

Existentialist

Philosophies

EMMANUEL MOUNIER

an Introduction

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EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHIES

EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHIES

AN INTRODUCTION

by
EMMANUEL MOUNIER



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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

MY first difficulty in making this translation has been the age-old one of conveying concepts, and especially abstract concepts, from one language to another. In my case, the difficulty has been increased because many of the Existentialist concepts are, apparently, difficult to express, even in French.

A second difficulty has been style. Most educated Frenchmen automatically write in what might be termed "the classical style" when dealing with "academic" subjects. The equivalent English style has been largely abandoned by present-day British writers on academic subjects, though traces of it persist in, say, leading articles (and sports reports) of *The Times*, which occasionally have to be re-read here and there before the meaning is clear. Moreover, in his desire to give a complete and unbiased summary of Existentialist philosophies, M. Mounier writes many long and often extremely complex sentences. The French logical mind may be capable of grasping at a glance the complete meaning of such sentences, but modern English composition tries to avoid them. Perhaps my greatest difficulty has been in dealing with the complexity of some of M. Mounier's sentences, and I am aware that some parts of my translation may make difficult reading, even though, as I hope, the meaning is clear. I can only say that it is difficult, without complete recasting, to break down sentences which have only one principal clause, and that complete recasting involves the risk of committing the unpardonable sin of "interfering" with the meaning of the original text.

There is a good deal of technical "jargon" in the Existentialist vocabulary, though its effect on the reader may be less mystifying than might be imagined. I have, after consultation with a Frenchman, translated most of this quite literally though it is possible that my phraseology may occasionally conflict with other English translations dealing with Existentialist philosophies. As far as "standard" technical terms of Philosophy are concerned, there is evidence that sometimes Frenchmen do not, perhaps, mean the same thing as we do by the same term. For instance, I am not at all sure what exactly is meant in this book by terms such as "transcendence" and "psycho-analysis."

There is also the "famous" Existentialist word "*angoisse*", which I translate as "anguish." I am quite aware, firstly, that *angoisse* does not mean exactly the same thing as "anguish," and secondly, that *angoisse* or "anguish" by no means conveys what Existentialists mean when they use the term in their particular technical sense. I also know that some translators have used the word "dread" as a translation of *angoisse*.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The plain fact is that the word *angoisse* seems to mean some sort of mental agitation which, so far, has been observed only by Existentialist philosophers, and, consequently, no word in any language conveys what is meant by it. Thus, wherever the word "anguish" appears in this book, it must be taken as referring to this particular form of mental agitation experienced by some Danish, German and French philosophers, and, presumably, observed by them in others. All one can suggest to help the British reader is that it seems to be a form of mental agitation which contains an element of what we understand by the term "anguish."

M. Mounier quotes from many French and German authors, and, of course, from Kierkegaard. As far as I know, only the works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and M. Berdyaev have been translated into English. I have, therefore, suggested to the publishers of this book that a list of all the works quoted from by M. Mounier (with an English translation) be printed at the end of the book, as it seems pointless to keep translating in footnotes titles of books and publications which, for the most part, do not exist in English print. I have also suggested that, in view of this, M. Mounier's purely "chapter and verse" footnotes be retained as they stand in the French text. His "explanatory" notes have, of course, been translated. I have made certain footnotes of my own in explanation of points in the French text which could hardly occur to the reader of the English translation.

As this book is intended for reading by "laymen" who have only a general and non-professional interest in new types of thought, I have made further footnotes with the object of saving the general reader the trouble and distraction of looking up strange terms or unfamiliar allusions. To the classicists and the professional philosophers who may regard this as presumptuous, I can only say that, while I can *understand* their annoyance, I can also assure them that it is no greater than that experienced by average Britons when confronted with unfamiliar technical terms and Latin quotations.

Finally, I must acknowledge my deep gratitude to M. André Seailles who spent many hours cheerfully removing "roadblocks" for me, checking my translation and drawing my attention to subtleties which few but Frenchmen could be legitimately expected to notice. I am also indebted to Miss Jean Campbell who patiently read over my MS while I checked with the French text for omissions, and whose knowledge of Old Testament mythology on one occasion drew my attention to an inaccuracy in the text.

ERIC BLOW.

OXFORD, November, 1947.

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HISTORICAL OUTLINE

THE very last thing in absurdity during this century must have been the craze for Existentialism, the degeneration into idle daily gossiping of a philosophy whose whole purpose is to drag us away from our idle gossiping.

There was a time when frivolous people had enough common sense to sip only the froth of intellectual thought; to-day, the madcaps are so frivolous that, in their desire for excitement, they have prodded that very swarm of doctrines which prefixes all its reflexion by declaring war to the death against frivolity. These people are not even aware of what they have done. Just let the world's misery be confined to a babbling café, and, lo, their worthy souls are comforted. This, then, has been the first bit of bad luck for Existentialism. But, this fantastic bad luck is already arousing interest—mockery chiefly haunts the courtyards of the gods.

Misfortunes, however, never come singly. If ever there was a word which seemed to be self-explanatory beyond any shadow of doubt, that word is certainly "Existentialism." But, no sooner has it left the preserve of philosophers and gone out into the world of laymen, than it immediately comes to mean a craze for imagining nothingness to be the basic fabric of existence. Nobody, outside the ranks of the intelligentsia, doubts that Existentialism had already begun to represent the richest and deepest stream of contemporary thought by the time the great genius of Jean-Paul Sartre turned its attention to certain aspects of the preserve more obvious than those of Existential psycho-analysis. We need not retaliate by excluding Jean-Paul Sartre from a place amongst Existentialist philosophers just because the popular section of his followers has concentrated on a clearly-labelled swindle.

Still, it is not too late to give honour where honour is due, and, ignoring the noisy craze, to bring this mixture of Existentialism and non-Existentialism which constitutes Sartrism back to its proper setting as the latest offshoot of one of the Existentialist traditions, a tradition which, starting from Heidegger, has set itself up in radical opposition to the founders of the modern philosophy of existence.

Our object is to re-establish here the neglected fulness of this tradition. Actually, no other has more to say to despondent contemporary man, but its message is not a message of despair. No other fortifies him better against his foolishness. But it prescribes for blind foolishness better than a logical foolishness.

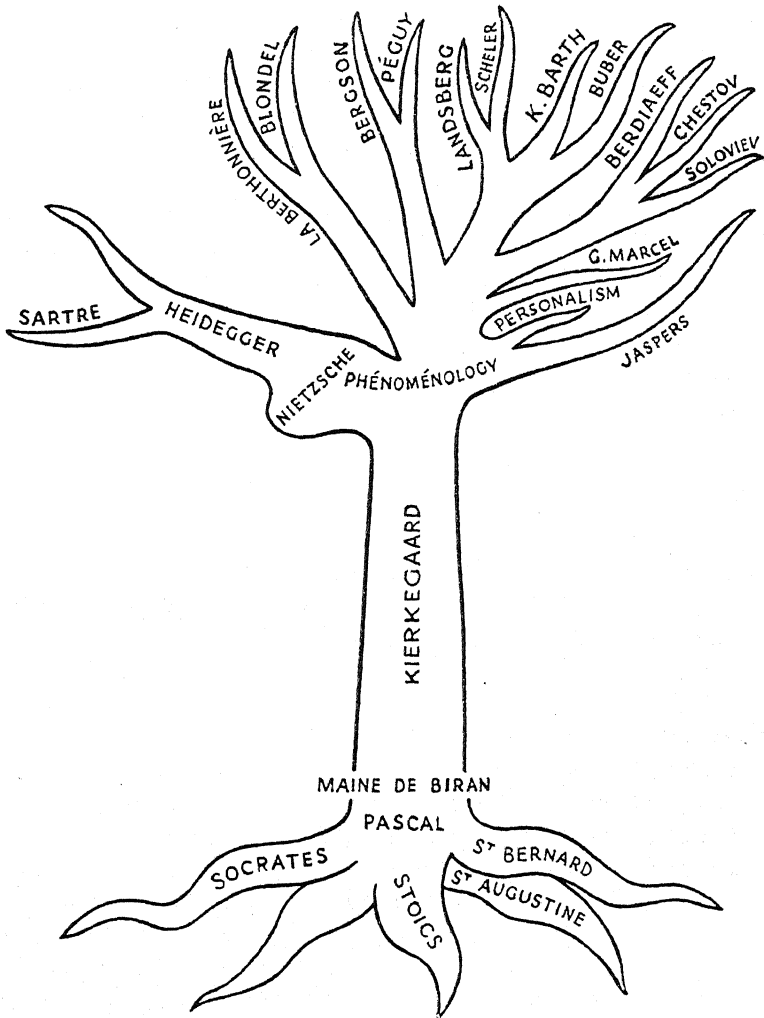
Strictly speaking, there is no philosophy which is not Existentialist. Science classifies apparent realities, industry is concerned with turning them to advantage. One wonders what a philosophy could be concerned with if it were not investigating existence and existents.

However, the name Existentialism has been more commonly applied to one specific stream of modern thought. In very general terms, this stream might be described as *a reaction of the philosophy of man against the excesses of the philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of things*. For it, the fundamental problem of philosophy is not so much existence in its widest sense as the existence of man. It accuses orthodox philosophy of having far too often ignored him in favour of philosophy about the world or about products of the mind.

In this sense, Existentialism can be traced back down a long gallery of ancestors. The history of philosophic thought is marked by a series of Existentialist revivals which have been for philosophic thought just so many conversions to itself and just so many redirections to its original mission. There was the call of Socrates opposing the cosmogonic musings of the Ionian physicians with the inward imperative of "Know thyself!" There was the Stoic message summoning those indefatigable Greeks in the midst of their frivolous games of Sophistry and Dialectics¹ to the mastery of oneself and to the real encounter with life. There was St. Bernard setting out in the name of Christian conversion and salvation on his crusade against Abelard's systematization of Faith. There was Pascal standing on the threshold of the great Cartesian campaign against those who delve too deeply into the Sciences and who are scarcely

¹ SOPHISTRY: Plausible but specious reasoning; the art, skill or practice of a Sophist. The Sophists were originally a class of professional teachers of grammar, rhetoric, philosophy and politics in ancient Greece; they were accused by Socrates of being skilled in the art of "making the worse appear the better cause."

DIALECTICS—DIALECTIC: The art or practice of trying to evolve a philosophical truth by logical discussion, especially by discussion involving question and answer. Perhaps the most elaborate system of dialectic is that associated with Hegel (1770-1831), the German philosopher. This consists of initially presenting two diametrically-opposed postulates about a particular subject. Each postulate is "analysed" by logical discussion, and a "synthesis," or "halfway-between proposition" is evolved. This, in turn, becomes one of two more diametrically-opposed postulates, from which a second synthesis is made. The process is continued until a generally-acceptable "truth" is evolved.—E.B.



THE EXISTENTIALIST TREE

concerned about man, or about his life and his death. But, with the advent of Pascal, we come right up to modern Existentialism. He blazed all the trails and he shaped almost every theory.

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard seems to be the titular father of the school. What a curious fate this has been for the original Existential philosophers! In their own day, they were remarkably modest about success. Success has amply repaid them for it. I don't know how the Danes got on for a hundred years with a prophet so unattractive to anyone in his right senses as Søren Kierkegaard. In any case, he had to wait until the beginning of this century before he was translated in Germany and until the troublous inter-War years before his works got to France. A similar fate awaited his French predecessor, Maine de Biran, whose star still shines so faintly, even in his native land. Maine de Biran had maintained the authority of purposeful existence against the humiliation of man by the Sensualist philosophers of the eighteenth century. Kierkegaard ranges himself against the Hegelian Absolute System, the systematization of system, which he opposes with his theory of Absolute Existence.

These men, then represent the bole of the Existentialist Tree. At the present time, the trunk is dividing into two branches.

One of them is immediately grafting itself on to the old Christian trunk, the lofty dignity, as opposed to Nature, of God's image, ransomed and summoned by Christ Incarnate; it represents the precedence of problems of salvation over the activities of knowledge and utility. Is there an ontological² atmosphere better prepared to receive the Existentialist call? Shouldn't it simply be said, then, that Existentialism is only another way of preaching Christianity? Such, no doubt, would be the reply of Pascal and Kierkegaard to a group of journalists pestering them for an interview. Moreover, they did not christen their philosophy by a new name; they saw no need for that. They considered themselves witnesses for Christian evidence, an evidence which is communicated more through testimony than by logic.

Existentialism reaped its richest harvest in the German School of Phenomenology. The branch through which the sap of Christianity runs has not produced a crop of Christians confident and comfortable in their doctrinal edifice. That would have been contrary to the very spirit of their belief. A man like Scheler switched several times from orthodoxy to independence, from one confession of faith to the opposite. A man like Jaspers, who set up Incompleteness as the measure of human

² ONTOLOGICAL—ONTOLOGY: the branch of metaphysics which treats of the nature of being or of existence regarded abstractedly or as such.—E.B.

existence, cannot even be called a Christian philosopher, even though every turn of this thought, except, perhaps, his latest, is clearly of Christian composition. Nobody is closer than he is to Kierkegaard and his rugged landscapes. Paul Louis Landsberg, whose work was prematurely halted in Orianenburg Concentration Camp, was carrying on this line. A Russian offshoot touches Soloviev, Chestov and Berdyaev. A Jewish branch leads to Buber. Through his dialectic theology, Karl Barth made no small contribution to the reintroduction of Kierkegaard to contemporary philosophy. Those who have heard the call of Bergson in all its sweetness, and sung its praises in lyric terms will (although Bergson does not use the name "Existentialism") recognize the voice of the Existentialist challenge protesting against the Positivist notion of the objectification of man. The poets who proclaim this challenge are Péguy and Claudel—signal peaks which often did not know of each other but which, nevertheless burned with the same internal fire. Since at the present time another shoot from the same stem is being tended there, it would be unjust to forget the works of La Berthonnière and Blondel whose pleadings, sometimes clumsy and sometimes imperfectly understood, for the theory of Divine Presence amount to the same thing as the eternal call to inwardness.

Gabriel Marcel represents present-day French Christian Existentialism coupled with certain of the earlier attempts to evolve a Personalist philosophy. As far as Existentialism is concerned, he identifies himself directly with the so-called School (?), and particularly with Jaspers. As a matter of fact, he anticipated the very phraseology of Jaspers in some passages of the *Journal métaphysique*.

Kierkegaard is one of those men, who, having left no system, cannot, in the strictest sense, have any disciples, and yet can claim a numerous posterity. Another of the isolated figures, Nietzsche, stands at the source of the second stream. The exact counterpart of John the Baptist, he tried to announce the end of the evangelical era by proclaiming the death of God to the men who, even after having been responsible for it, dared not accept it as a fact. At first, this death was joyously accepted by the circle. There never was a time of livelier optimism or a calmer atmosphere of indifference than that end-of-the-century period which sat so happily amidst its ruins that not even the fall of Christendom or the awful predictions of science or the beginnings of the social apocalypse could succeed in arousing it.

Nietzsche bursts like an unseasonable clap of thunder in the holiday sky. Happiness was torn to shreds during this autumn of the West,

and exposed to the equinoctial gales which are lifting our roofs and flattening our gardens to-day. Like Kierkegaard, he, too, had to wait for his voice to carry, and for despair to be engraved on hearts stricken by the Divine Presence, and deceived by mystical theories of regeneration. From the conjunction of the philosophies of these two men a new form of Stoicism was to be evolved. By this, man is glorified in his struggle against his fundamental solitude.

The ancients used to say that scepticism is never given its due. In the same spirit, this philosophy of complete hopelessness accuses modern Rationalism of being afraid, in the light of actual experience, to hold up to man the wretched unreal type of being postulated by Positivism. Existentialism abruptly presents us with nothingness, the bottomless pit of experience. Such is the form of philosophy represented by the Atheistic line of Existentialism which runs from Heidegger to Sartre, and which, at the present time, is being so roundly condemned by those who imagine it to represent the whole of Existentialism.³

A brief examination will assure us that the first Existentialist tradition concedes nothing to the second, either in completeness or in influence. No matter how weak the link between them may be, however, their common origin can never be forgotten. They both have a certain way of setting problems, and they both re-echo many ideas which are, at least, of common origin. These facts insure that the liaison between the two most extremely opposite forms of Existentialism is always smoother than that between all of them collectively and the particular ideas which are foreign to their common suppositions. Moreover, it has struck me that this fact provides one means of guiding us through the realms of Existentialism, rather than of devoting ourselves to detailed study of any outstanding concepts of Existentialism. Of course, we shall have to do this even if it means studying the transformations each form undergoes in the course of changing from one tradition to the other.

We shall not attempt to classify Kafka, the unclassifiable. No other writer leaves us more completely suspended in the distress of abandonment, yet, no other writer creates in us while we are in this state such a sharp feeling of some form of transcendence and of possible hope—*possible* hope only . . .

I

THE CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHIC REVIVAL

IT has been customary, ever since Kant's¹ day, to begin any system of philosophy with a Theory of Knowledge. Since I am going to exercise my mind, I must first of all ask myself how satisfactory the apparatus is which I am going to use in order to exercise it. This very order of priority implies that thinking is not considered from the angle of man's being, that is, as one of his manifestations, but solely from the angle of things so that they can be classified and made use of as instruments. Now, the instrument has its own particular system of imperialistic development. From being the means of effecting a transformation, it tends to develop into a means of production, and then speculation, with all its fantastic tricks, takes a hand in the business. And, by the way, we must be careful to observe the effect of the double meaning of words. Whatever has happened in the economic world is sure to be reflected in the philosophic sphere. Free and unfettered thinking is hashed up into a game with figures and meaningless words; the barriers against unreality and absurdity are thereby removed and man's life, the purport and perfection of the life of the universe, is in danger of being lost sight of.

Existentialism refuses to hand man over to any sort of instrument before it knows something about the nature, potentialities and qualifications of the agent who is going to use it. It does not claim that man is easier to understand than matter but that understanding of him takes

¹ KANT, Immanuel, (1724-1804): Probably the most famous of German philosophers; b. Königsberg where, in 1770, he became professor of logic and metaphysics. His most celebrated work is *The Critique of Pure Reason*, published in 1781. Kant's philosophy is very difficult to understand and a brief summary of it would fill a volume. Perhaps his two most outstanding contributions to modern philosophy are the theory of the Categorical Imperative claiming the ethical "authority" of certain "absolute" and "universally-derived" "rules," and the claim that man is capable of exercising pure reason only when his mind is in a state of absolute freedom from all the psychological effects of the knowledge we acquire in the *apparent* world of reality in which we normally live. It is only in the transcendent world of true reality that we have true knowledge.—E.B.

precedence over mere knowledge about the world and over all laws and ideas.

“ I think it is a good thing not to elaborate the Copernican theory : but this . . . It is vitally important to know whether the soul is mortal or immortal.”²

Is knowledge really the fundamental thing ? To know himself and to know the world with a full and fruitful understanding, shouldn't man himself be a full and fruitful existence ? Going back to Claudel's lines, shouldn't he also know himself so that he can exercise to the necessary extent his mastery over the world ? Rationalism talks as if knowledge were always moving, automatically or laboriously, towards an enrichment of the human being. That is what is disputed.

It seems, in fact, that philosophers, in league with scientists, are bent on ridding the world of man's presence. By a sort of fundamental abstractedness (which should, perhaps, be made the subject for an attempt at ethical analysis), they have built up the myth of a world which is primarily the world to the exclusion of personality; it is a purely objective thing with no person in it to make it credible. And then, not content with discarding man, they felt annoyed even by existence because it was a vague and shameful survival of man's presence. They then set to work to create a world composed purely of matter, that is to say, of pure hypotheses, and, consequently, it ultimately became a matter of complete indifference as to whether they existed or not. In order to prevent such a world from going up in smoke, they certainly had to retain it as a sort of film of existence, even if this was a mere formality, like a convention among well-bred gentlemen for the maintenance of professional status. Thus, the concept of existence was seen to be being drained, little by little, of its substance, and, if one may say so, to be being steadily filled with nothingness, just as the provinces of the Empire were gradually infiltrated by the Barbarians who were destined one day to undermine it.

This sort of world, in which no form of existence, with its opaqueness, its oddity, its unpredictable and inexhaustible spontaneity, could withstand critical analysis, offered philosophy a temptation to which it has always been greedily susceptible. *It could be systematically set out.* And philosophers did not neglect to do so. All of those working along this line converge on the man who built their cathedral of Absolutism, Hegel. All that is real is rational, all that is rational is real. Classification has dispelled mystery, the professor has dethroned the hero and the saint.

² Pascal, *Pensées*, Ed. Brunschvicg, p. 218. Cf. also pp. 66, 194.

It is just at the moment when the decay of the notion of existence reaches in Hegel's philosophy this sort of majestic twilight triumph that there arises one of those prophets who from time to time throughout history stand up and cry "No!" Kierkegaard's protest, coming at the end of the experiment, is a response to the protest which Pascal made against it in its initial stages. "There cannot be any system of existence."³ System is a sort of abstract third factor interposed between the existing philosopher and existing beings. It is neither a being nor even an utterance. "Philosophising does not consist of holding-forth in fantastic speeches to fantastic beings; but it is to existents that you must speak."⁴ And it must always be an existent who does the speaking. Herein lies the outstanding omission, the original sin, of Rationalism. It has forgotten that *the conscious mind is an existing mind*, and that it is so, not by virtue of some inherent logic, but because of a personal and creative resolve. Moreover, the existent does not ask questions in vain. He does not seek *the* truth, a truth which is universally impersonal and unimpressive, but, in the light of an undoubtedly real universality, he seeks *his* truth, a truth which is in accordance with his aspirations, crowns his efforts and straightens out his problems. This complementary (but not confiscatory) nature of truth, which is very strongly emphasized by Jaspers, we see revealed and upheld in the works of Scheler and Blondel with a calmer intensity, the intensity of understanding, and, with what one might call educative discretion.

An existent is not a wax tablet on which ideas, convictions and orders are stamped; he is a dialectic movement from an implied way of thinking to a reflective way of thinking, from a dully and darkly desiring will to a desired will, and the ideas, calls and orders, transcendent though they be, must go out to seek in the heart of this movement the conditions they have come to supply. It follows, therefore, that the mind must become flesh, and, for every man, the flesh of his very existence. It is not *death* that is a philosophic problem, but the fact *that I do die*. The problem of the immortality of the soul is not a learned study limited to a group of specialists, but is a problem which is concerned with finding out whether *I am immortal*, and my whole life depends on the answer. "It would be rational," said Kierkegaard, "if being a thinker and being a man somehow involved the least possible difference."

The existent must run away from the shelters in which he has been hiding from the problems which are throttling him. The shelter of

³ *Post-Scriptum*, Ed. Gallimard, p. 78.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 80.

systematization is not the only one. History, be it history of the universe, or of ideas, or of men, can perform the same function. Now, history brings us less insight than an intense reflexion does about our own life. Even when it does concern itself with men, it merely juggles with results and even only the remnants of results. It knows nothing about the spirit which has given acts their novelty and their importance. From the time of *Considerations inactuelles* up to *Clio* and the School of Phenomenology, a complete Existentialist process of positive history has been developed and this is now challenging the claims of orthodox history.

Another method of systematization, scarcely noticeable, is that which daily routine builds up round us. Kierkegaard described it as the universe of the *immediate neighbourhood*. For Heidegger, it is the world of *indifference* and *preoccupation*. The former stressed its automaton-like and unreflective nature, the latter emphasized that sort of stifling of complete living which it produces. Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel expose the deceptive mask of evidence by which it poses as the universe of the *thoroughly natural*. By their reassuring familiarity, the objects which it creates conceal on all sides the mystery of existence.⁵ Ideas come into it from man himself and avoid tackling the problem or even of entertaining the possibility of anything odd; the great driving force of spiritual doubting is excluded from it. Going still further, it is, for Sartre, the resigned and dispirited world of *Dirty Beasts*,⁶ a closed, empty and disheartening world; the carefree world of the libertines has become a damper.

All these naïve and pedantic systems, all these networks, which are thought to be spiritual, serve only one purpose, *to secure peace and quiet*. They are, according to Péguy, systems of tranquillity which are liked because under them we can take it easy. Hastily constructed or permanent barrages against the future and its uncertainties, against the unknown, against adventure and its dangers, they all conspire to eliminate the distracted anguish which inevitably springs forth from the disquieting depths of being. For Existential philosophers, mistrust of systems of ideas generally goes hand in hand with mistrust of all machinery designed to stifle, in the same way, the spontaneity and doubt of existents—Churches, States, Factions, the various Orthodoxies, none of which yields even to an anarchist tendency. Jaspers, for instance, who has carried the criticism of collective machinery to great lengths, has shown

⁵ G. Marcel: *Etre et Avoir*, Ed. Montaigne, p. 165.

⁶ Sartre's term is "*salauds*," which is not a "drawing-room word" in polite French society. I use "beasts" in deference to the English Indecent Publications Act.—E.B.—(*La Nausée*).

comparatively its absolute necessity as an intermediary between the particular and the universal. But we shall continue to find among the protagonists of authentic existence an attitude of shuddering vigilance towards it. Followers or adherents though they are, they are not a very cheerful lot of partisans.

There is, then, a philosophical Original Sin. No matter how learned you may have to be to commit it, this sin is not confined to philosophers. Each individual person commits it when, in order to submit himself to the blanket of tranquillity, he gives up being an existent, that is to say, when he gives up being a fervent, free and self-confident being who faces up to his life sensibly and courageously. There are many of these blankets; there is one sort for scholars and another sort for ordinary folk; yet they are basically the same thing. It is still a dominant theme of Existentialist thinking that, to oppose any kind of gnosticism (the philosophic act, the most banal act), the stages of the thinking could not be otherwise than the stages of a life which is being converted to the fuller state of existence. An attempt is made to introduce the Positivist attitude, philosophic detachment, to us as a superior sort of existence. Actually, we must observe in this a fundamental slothfulness, the sinful act of an existent who is gambling with his existence for the slumber which is necessary to support life. By such a submission, the existent not only lets his substance melt away, but he also drags the world into the nothingness which he exudes. The universe of Parmenides or of Spinoza or of Valéry melts away into a state of non-being. Worldly concern has destroyed man, and man in his turn, is frittering away the world.

If, then, knowledge is our aim, the first stage in philosophy is not, therefore, a conscious step, at least in the latest sense of the word. It consists in peremptorily summoning man back from intimate or worldly distractions to his state of being as an existent. "All my effort," exclaimed Gabriel Marcel, "can be described as a straining towards the production—I dislike using this physical term—of currents by which life is restored to certain areas of the mind which seemed to have sunk into torpor and begun to decay." The first step in philosophy is a call to action: "Man, wake up!" It is this life of the existent, in all its intensity and with all its responsibilities, which Kierkegaard calls *inwardness*, or *subjectivity*⁷. Don't let us, however, be deceived by words. The subject is not, thereby, shut up in his "I—I" but is facing up to the whole world which is "made infinite in an eternal universe, and,

⁷ He also says: "infinite emotion," "infinite certitude of emotion," and "infinitely interested form of being."

at the same time, he is, to a greater extent than ever before, converted into his real self.”⁸ Undoubtedly, when a man has been thus directed towards his inwardness, he can lose himself in it and go mad. But wait. Absence of inwardness is another kind of madness, even if it is hardly discernible, because it is sociable madness. No one dares to think much about the first kind of madman, the madman who is deep in his inward dream, but the second kind of madman, the lucid and contented madman, whose life is nothing more than that of a thing among things, we also shudder to contemplate, “for fear of finding that he no longer has real eyes but glass ones and hair of straw—in short, that he is an artificial production.”⁹ He calls to mind that other kind of madman who, in order to prove that he was cured of his madness, kept on repeating this phrase, which he thought “objective”: “Whoops! The earth is round!”

This denseness of the individual subject is essential to the success and to the quality of the act of knowing. Pascal does not try to convert the incredulous man or to present him with proofs before he has shaken him out of his state of indifference and urged him on, from a vague form of doubting, to an impassioned and never-ending form of doubting. Existentialism tends to reduce subjective certitude or assurance, the last refuge of spiritual immobility, in order to assist dynamic and mobile passion which inwardly unites the existent with truth. He will then have to follow this line of thinking almost to the point of maintaining that the important thing is not so much truth as the attitude towards truth of the man who has gained knowledge. Three or four times, Kierkegaard and Jaspers stress this method of finding one’s way. In any case, without the inward attitude, knowledge is acquired in vain; it is deadened through consciousness of itself. The Christian who imagines he is praying to God, but who is, in fact, only imploring an accessory to his lusts or to his own particular desires is not really praying to God, but to an idol, and, to be even more precise, he is not praying at all. It is just the same for anyone who thinks only by means of his desires or by means of the machinery of his ideas. Socrates, on the other hand, decides about immortality with a reservation, but, by this very reservation, he does enjoy his life. There you have true knowledge, that of the “subjective thinker.” To exist is his first concern; the existence going on round about him is his greatest interest.¹⁰

⁸ *Post-Scriptum*, Ed. Gallimard, p. 127.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

If existence, and particularly human existence, cannot be the object of systematization, the relations between the man who is seeking knowledge and the world are upset by it. We must abandon the traditional outline (whose perceptible origin is obvious) of conscience or of knowledge, "the eye of the mind," setting itself up *in front of* the world which it regards as something to be gazed at and something which it systematizes from a distance.

Strictly speaking, nothing is more ambiguous than this metaphor of the eye. At one time, it is the receiving apparatus; at another, it is the source of the light which illuminates the object. Gabriel Marcel has stressed the traditional error which likens personal conscience to a circle of light which is itself of maximum clarity (the soul easier to understand than matter), but which throws around itself a diminishing area of illumination. On the contrary, wouldn't the primordial fact be the opaqueness which I am for myself? And, moreover, doesn't the opaqueness of the world develop from that opaqueness which I create by intervening between myself and the next man? But this sort of intervention and this form of intrusion of myself on the world I cannot avoid. They form part of my fundamental state. From then on, the term "certain knowledge," which is pictured as a kind of translucent vision, no longer correctly describes the original act of consciousness. The transparency of the *Cogito* is a superficial illusion. When you examine it thoroughly, it is found to include an element of impenetrable obscurity. The very act of thinking is a mystery; it is not entirely clear to the mind.¹¹

Moreover, in this form of act, the man who has acquired knowledge doesn't *stand off from* the world, doesn't *stand up* in front of the world in order to survey the world as a spectacle, and to describe it from a distance. To define a man or a thing is the most superficial act in the process of knowing. The more we accept reality, the more it ceases to be comparable with an object placed in front of us on which we can take our bearings. Basically, it is undefinable.¹² Being is an "inexhaustible concretion" which cannot be defined, but can only be recognized, in the same way that a person is recognized, or, perhaps, it would be better to say "greeted" rather than recognized.¹³ The metaphor of possession does not succeed in establishing contact between the man who has acquired knowledge and being. We can only possess what is classifiable and valid. Now,

¹¹ *Etre et Avoir*, p. 13-14. *Du refus à l'invocation*, Ed. Gallimard, p. 95.

¹² *Etre et Avoir*, p. 179.

¹³ *Du refus* . . . p. 96.

if existence is inexhaustible, it is *non-classifiable* right down to its tiniest particle. All the knowledge that I shall acquire about it (knowledge being a possession of the knower) will always remain an inferior quality by comparison with what I do not know about it. Thus the classifiable state is the home of despair. The sort of knowledge which, while not wedded to the life of the object, tries to pile directions and limiting factors on it, is a hopeless and disheartening sort of knowledge—interminable and interminably empty. It is this which, in Péguy's critical poem, sustains Clio's sadness. Sartre's nauseated man abandons this straight-out nonsense; one single thought for his own welfare, thus hardened into possessable totalness, is sufficient to convince him of the stupidity of it. Right from the start, he is fed up with it, and, since he is fed up with it, he has already had too much of it. Nausea is the disease which attacks the man who wants to possess the world, at the very moment when he is overcome by an ontological giddiness caused by the cloudy vanity which arises from this very possession.

Here, we strike the powerful argument as to why existence cannot be systematized. System is a kind of index or instrument. It collects evidence or it strings facts together. But inexhaustibility cannot be estimated and intangible things cannot be strung together. Kierkegaard said, when he was classifying it as the type of Existential truth, that Christian truth has something in common with the nettle—subjectivity gets stung by it and will not grasp it firmly. This is what Pascal meant when he called it incomprehensible yet reasonable. And, speaking of a conversation, there is mention somewhere in *Don Quixote* of a knight who tilted at the Church. We can understand the difficulty which Existential philosophers have in tabulating such attacks on human beings. A sort of inward life seemed to doom Pascal's *Thoughts* to remain eternally scattered.¹⁴ Is it not they which define the philosophical approach as a perpetual digression which is always wandering away from the final goal, but which is always coming back to it? In form, Kierkegaard's works, like Péguy's, are nothing but a twisted sort of conversation, the thread of which is often lost. Gabriel Marcel, while stressing throughout all his works the impossibility of writing "his philosophy" in coherent language, finally comes to rejoice in the fact that he can't. This impotence,

¹⁴ "Scattered"—Here, there is possibly a reference to the fact that Pascal's *Thoughts* were first published eight years after his death by a Committee of Jansenists. They form a very incoherent publication, and claims have often been made that it is a garbled version of the MSS left by Pascal. In the middle of the nineteenth century, a new version of the MSS was published, which, although much less incoherent, is claimed to be much more garbled.—E.B.

he thinks, shows that thinking is an *approach*, rather than a systematization, a *laying of foundations*, rather than a construction of an edifice, a *clearing of the ground*, which is always being restarted without any progress being made, rather than a definite pathway. "It is not so much a question of building up as of digging down."¹⁵

This refusal systematically to enforce our consciousness on our existence can be carried to great or less lengths.

An extreme position is taken up here by Jaspers. Generalizing Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel, he sets himself up as the accuser of traditional knowledge. Objective knowledge is essentially a classification of beings into more and more general categories, and all these categories are to be included in The Being, the most generalized, and at the same time, the most worthless category. Plato and Aristotle, although subject to this temptation, characteristic of the Greek philosophy which introduced it to the West, did not yield to it, for they saw that the human being cannot be generalized into any one category. But, for Jaspers, the human being is something else besides being articulated or diversified. *The human being is torn asunder*.¹⁶ He reveals himself in three incommunicable guises: as an object (from the point of view of subjects); as ego (wrapped up in subjectivism); and as himself (in his state of transcendence¹⁷): the world, freedom, transcendence. These three guises simultaneously attract and repel each other in constant rivalry, and each is torn asunder within itself. Thus, the ego must be supported by the world of objects, in order, as an existent, to triumph over the possessiveness of the objective world; it must be simultaneously destroyed and recreated within the transcendent state of existence which summons it only to crush it. There is doubt and distraction everywhere. Being is revealed only in glimpses which have no connexion with each other. For us, at least, there is no Being; there are only existents, and it is not every existent who can himself be considered a fit subject for philosophical study, in the strict sense of the phrase. Strictly speaking, knowledge is applicable only to a sort of conceptualization of their past or their future, but not to that matrix of existence which represents the

¹⁵ *Du refus* . . . p. 22 and introd.—*Homo Viator*, Ed. Montaigne, p. 190.

¹⁶ Gabriel Marcel calls one of his plays *The Broken World*. He speaks elsewhere (*Homo Viator*, p. 213) of "erratic clusters in a ruined universe."

¹⁷ TRANSCENDENCE—TRANSCENDENT: Quality of surpassing, excelling, superior to. (Theol.) The attribute of God in being superior to, apart from, and not subject to the conditions of the material universe. TRANSCENDENTALISM—A system of philosophy (usually associated with Kant) which emphasizes the intuitive, rather than the empirical elements in thought and knowledge.—E.B.

moment of eternity when freedom decides upon its choice. Existence involves the free act, and the free act is unintelligible as far as man is concerned. Existence is something which never becomes an object; it can be conceived only in terms of gushing-forth. It represents the *fundamental resurgence* (*Ursprung*) responsible for my thinking and my acting. It is not a concept; it is a pointer which indicates a hinterland to all forms of subjectivity. It is "what I cannot avoid being, but it is not seeing and knowing." It is, as Gabriel Marcel would maintain, the consciousness that something in the world depends on me, and on me alone. In such a perspective as this, concern about totalness, the chief concern of philosophies of systematization, is replaced by concern about intensity, in the case in which existence is considered as something closer to reality, or by *authenticity*, in the case where you believe more in the reflective type of existence.

How is it possible to describe the type of consciousness which is left after all this? Being can only be described or understood in its external parts. Basically, it can only be illuminated. For Jaspers, this word has a special sense. It means a light which is projected (or received), as it were, laterally, and which is simultaneously seen and unseen, like objects in the marginal focus, and whose clarity, isolated in a sort of solitary intuition, is not capable of creating visibility or of any intelligible explanation. All the rational controls which we can exercise over existence are only a vague set of numbers whose logic alone provides no key.

We find elsewhere less acceptance of the distractive notion about being. Heidegger admirably begins his philosophic investigation by an exhaustive analysis of human existence, taking advantage of the fact that man is the only existing creature who possesses the faculty of questioning himself. But he condemns Jaspers' *Existential* philosophy for renouncing a theory of the human-being-in-general, and confronts him with his own peculiar "*Super-Existential*" philosophy¹⁸ which, so it seems, in addition to a theory about human existence (the *Dasein*) necessarily involves presentation of a theory of being. The theory of *Dasein* had already led him to spread over his conception of existence the ingenious network of Super-Existentialism, that is, the edifices of existence. But, it must certainly be pointed out that, up to this point, he has not yet emerged from his analysis of *Dasein*, and there are good

¹⁸ To describe Heidegger's particular form of Existentialism, M. Mounier uses the newly-coined adjective "existential," as opposed to the normal French adjective "existentiel" which is used throughout the book. There is obviously no direct means of translating such a distinction. The *-al* ending would seem to indicate a greater degree of intensity.—E.B.

reasons for believing, as his commentator, M. de Walhens, does, that, from the way in which he has conducted it, he has prevented all likelihood of ever leaving it.

Gabriel Marcel's long pilgrimage through the realms of philosophic Idealism necessarily left him permanently concerned about reconciling a method of deep enquiry, necessary for understanding of existence, with the requirements of a more continuous consciousness. He tries to do this by means of his distinction between the *mystery* and the *problem*.¹⁹ To follow this, let us start from the description of an almost entirely objectivated man separated from his existence. We already find this sort of objectification in Jaspers' works. It is enlarged upon in the philosophy of Berdyaev²⁰ and Chestov who, like all Russians, regard objectification as Original Sin, the cause of the downfall of the world.

Take, for instance, a ticket-collector in an Underground station, punching tickets with a vague sub-consciousness from morning till night, or a man with a small private income sitting back in comfort. These are the sort of lives which upset you to think that they are quasi-functionalized, with their hidden springs and their faculty for wonder gradually drying up. Ultimately, they become lives without any mystery. When we are faced with such forms of non-existence, we are seized with an irresistible urge which compels us to reveal their mystery, to probe the secret fulness of their existence which cannot be reduced, as it might seem it could be, to a series of inconsistent states, or to a tale told by an idiot.

I can only stifle this urge by means of some arbitrary act, by means of some violent measure which crushes the very roots of spirituality. I don't seize upon it as a reality to be gazed at; it really takes possession of me; it exalts me or else it stifles me. It immediately confronts me with my own problem, producing in me the same metaphysical power of excitement which, according to Jaspers, the act of a suicide produces in us. A spirit of interrogation takes possession of me; if I respond to it, it will provide me with an inexhaustible stock of questions, and, yet, they will all centre round the profound assertion that I do exist. Thus, an existent is a man who stumbles upon mysteries, but who stumbles on them, so to speak, inside himself; he is, one is almost compelled to say, a man who is perplexed by them. A non-existent is a man who is not affected by the spirit of wonder.

¹⁹ See: *Attitudes and Approaches to Ontological Mystery* in the appendix to *The Broken World* (*Le Monde Cassé*—Ed. Desclée et Brewer).

²⁰ *Cinq méditations sur l'existence*, Ed. Montaigne, *Etre et liberté*, Ed. Je sers.

This fear of being "clogged" in existence, which haunts Sartre (it would be interesting to know whether in spite of or because of his praise of the notion of attachment) is not basically a fear of that profound concept of *abandonment* which is so very well analysed by Jaspers and which is essentially a pre-requisite to the discovery of being. But, even if we do have to steep ourselves in mystery in order to understand it, it is no blind experiment totally unconnected with the problems of logic. The problem is, in fact, the very difficulty I am faced with and which is barring my way. I tackle it and clearly distinguish myself from it; I can surround it. Mystery only becomes the problem when I find myself attracted; when I am in doubt—I, in my state of totalness²¹ and my state of being, just as much as in my state of doubting. The essential feature of the problem is that it is wholly presented to me. Every problem has an underlying mystery, in so far as it responds to this ontological re-echoing. "A mystery is a problem which intrudes upon its own given ideas, a problem which attacks its own ideas but which overreaches itself in the same way as an ordinary problem does." Far from being disintegrated, however, by this plunge it gains, on the contrary, a rebounding force and is filled with an inward light which creates new problems *ad infinitum*. This, in turn, develops an activity which is increased tenfold by problematic reasoning.

Thus, the first concern of any form of Existentialist reflexion will be to prevent "mysteries" from becoming merely "problems" whose complicated dialectic will obscure the path with ontological gaps. There is no evidence that the practical adoption of an idea, even a profound one, tends to obscure its meaning and to debase it. Even for the greatest men, there comes a time when the dialectical instrument begins to sound hollow, and to become intoxicated by its own evolutions.²² If this warning is born in mind, the method will be to tackle problems, like the problem of existence, the problem of death, the problem of possessiveness, and to make them hinge on this question of irruption from the centre (if it can be so-called) which we have already described. Or, better still, to indicate, in the all too rationalized list of problems, points of mystery—certain important fundamental concepts, such as fidelity, hope and treachery, by means of which man can get to grips with his situations or his fundamental temptations.

²¹ TOTALNESS—TOTALITY: The text has "*totalité*" which has been usually translated as "totality." I feel that this word, however, is likely to lead to confusion in the British mind with the word "totalitarianism," and, therefore, prefer to translate "*totalité*" by the coined word "totalness."—E.B.

²² *Du refus* . . . p. 83.

Should metaphysics still be considered? The term implies that this latest type of philosophy is still finding its way along by extending the objective world. Now, Existential philosophy is always urging us to adopt a complete reversal of the objective point of view. As Bergson says, it is urging us to a twisting of the habits of the mind. Here, philosophy does not begin with an acquisition, but with a conversion, a *metanoia*,²³ just as religion does. This conversion presents two aspects: it represents silence, intensity, progression, or, as Gabriel Marcel would call it, *reflective abstraction*;²⁴ in the other aspect, it represents false enlightenment and distracting preoccupations. Like Jaspers, he describes reflective abstraction as an inward renunciation, a "relaxing in the presence of," a recognition of what is already there and awaiting me, if I decide to look back—to use the example of the myth about the cavern, the fundamental Existentialist myth. But this dialectic of reflective abstraction is not a sort of quietism. Reflective abstraction also requires me to keep on resuming my existence right to the end of my life. *My being* is, however, not the same thing as *my life*. Gabriel Marcel has strongly emphasized the necessity of guarding against the degradation of Existentialism into a glorification of vitally-necessary overflowing. To some extent, this is what Nietzsche has done.²⁵

Finally, could we object to the far too mild nature of philosophical terminology? Jaspers' more dramatic phraseology goes on to refer to "wrenching." Yet, we have an earlier example of this in the ever-biting *maieutic*²⁶ attitude of the Socratic irony. But, here, Existentialists express themselves only in quasi-religious terms, even when they are, as Heidegger always is, on their guard against all reference to ethical concepts. Thus it is that, following the lead of Kierkegaard, they introduce the phraseology of sinfulness in the very midst of a dialectic of being. Yet, for Kierkegaard, sin is no accident; it is the very fibre of the being himself who, in order to exist, must make himself exceptional, and who becomes sinful by this very same exceptionalness. Jaspers goes on to stress the paradox even more. For him, existence is always being shared between a form of objectivity which tends to disaffect it and a form of subjectivity which tends to fritter it away. It must, however, be supported by objectivity in order to gain stability, and it must accept the strictness of subjectivity in order to be able to plumb the utmost

²³ "*Metanoia*" (Gk.)—literally, a change of attitude of mind.—E.B.

²⁴ *Etre et Avoir*, p. 164; *Position et approches* . . . p. 274.

²⁵ *Position et approches* . . . p. 274.

²⁶ "*Maieutic*" (Gk.)—literally, to do with midwifery. Socrates referred to himself as a "philosophic midwife," helping to give birth to truth.—E.B.

depths of being. In the first case, it is sinful because it takes up restrictive attitudes, and it is sinful, too, in the second case, because it makes the decision to perpetuate its restriction. Thus, our existence is always sinful, and it might almost be claimed that existence in this world is just as impossible as the act of pure good will is for Kant. We are sinful by the very fact that we exist, and, yet, the only dignified thing we can do is to try to exist.

Existential conversion is not, therefore, comparable with an original redemption, obtained, once and for all, for everybody. Because it is continually compromised by the relapse into the subjective void, Jaspers thinks of it as a *straining*, and, at other times, as an incessant *struggle*. To the Rationalist ideal of objectivity and impartiality, Existentialist philosophers oppose a militant concept of intelligence. In this respect, Nietzsche and the Christian Existentialists are on common ground. *Intelligence is not neutral*. Heidegger vigorously opposed the claim of his master, Husserl, to put fundamental questions about existence on one side in order to study existence. One cannot describe existence without first formulating a concept of existence, and one does not describe existence in order to discover this concept; one describes existence in order that, once having formulated the concept of it by means of the authority of free inclination, one may experience it. We must get rid of the prejudice that the desire to detach oneself from the object automatically facilitates the acquisition of knowledge. Apart from the instance of knowledge gained from observation (which is the case for Science), knowledge is, on the contrary, closely connected with an intimate participation, on the part of the seeker after knowledge, in the life of the object, and with a sharing of the *risk* undertaken by the object.²⁷

Let us stress once more that, in this respect, common *intelligence* must undoubtedly prevail. It is through misconception that a system of logic based on sensation has been imputed to the Existentialist method. One can only say that the real danger in Existentialism is that it may fall back on one of those Emotionalist philosophies, which haunt the nightmares of M. Benda, just the same as one can say that the danger in objective methods is that they may degenerate into Positivism. Existentialism simply refuses to hand the monopoly of revealing reality over to the system of classification demanded by Rationalism. It is, for instance, one of Heidegger's constant claims (and Sartre will be found to have taken it up against the Freudian idea of the *Unconscious*), that we are affected by realities which, although they are not exactly realities

²⁷ P. L. Landsberg: *Réflexions sur l'engagement personnel*, *Esprit*, Nov., 1937.

of the unconscious, never succeed in crossing the threshold of consciousness. They are, in fact, revealed by fundamental sensations (*Stimmung*) whose capacity for revelation is superior to the explanatory capacity of the consciousness which is to develop them. The word "sensation" is ambiguous: nothing must be considered in this connexion which calls to mind biological urge or the enraptured ecstasy of emotionalism. We must substitute instead of the concept of perception, at once global and lateral, something quite different from perception in the ordinary sense of the word. It is in this way, for example, that we are conscious of our fundamental position in the world. We ought to refer to intelligence as ambiguous yet implicit; as not merely conscious, but laterally so. Thus, our fundamental conception of existence, this manner of treating men and the life of man, which directs our every move, is obviously lived by us, and yet it is neither clearly nor fundamentally understood by us.

It is there, in us, according to the claim of Barrès, like an open secret; it is similar to those ideas, animating us and guiding us, which we pick up sometimes in a book which gives them just that form of expression which we have not been able to give them. This confused consciousness, according to Heidegger, has already become *interpretation*, even if it is inexplicit and without any subject of reference. It is implied and active interpretation—*elaboration* rather than elucidation. It can make the object of an explanation posterior by means of its phraseology, or simply by its behaviour.

The woman who is reading and who, after a vague feeling of uneasiness, abstractedly pulls off the scarf which is making her feel too hot, while still remaining absorbed in her book, has expressed her feeling by this gesture. Perhaps, however, she has inwardly made the statement: "It's too hot!" and it will not be until a short time afterwards that she will make this unconscious gesture of hers.

This type of attachment constitutes the grave *sincerity* of philosophy. Sincerity is alternately an object of favour and of attack in Existential criticism. It is a fact that there are, according to Kierkegaard, two kinds of sincerity. Narrow-minded sincerity, the "sincerity of professors,"²⁸ is an antipathy towards the goodness of the being within us and outside ourselves. It is this that Nietzsche had already finally disposed of in "The Stodgy Outlook." The very idea of this flight of fancy seemed to him much too solid and too violent to provoke the celestial swiftness of dynamic thinking. He regarded the latter as very closely connected with

²⁸ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 187.

dancing; he loved to talk of the cheerful accomplishments and the golden laughter of tragic man.²⁹ Existential sincerity is, at once, an attachment and a detachment, a concern about Divine Presence and about being fitted into a scheme of things, and a fear of being fixed in any position which is taken up and of being tied to strict loyalties. It reveals in itself the basis of the comedy which escapes the sincerity of the narrow-minded man; he insidiously gets possession of it, and surrounds himself with a shell of irony so as not to become petrified by the limitations of assertiveness. It is a dependent and dialectical sincerity, at the opposite extremity to the independent and solid sincerity of the man of private means.

Comedy purifies pathos there, and pathos invigorates comedy. It is none other than subjectivity in its double guise, the eternal side of man in its double revelation; it is the realization of the weight of sin and of the duty of existing, and the airiness of the transcendental call which prevents repetition from becoming merely habit.³⁰ In the regular and easy rhythm of this dialectic, there is no longer any opposition between Existential attachment and the detachment of the existent; "the most consecrated are the most detached."³¹

²⁹ *Volonté de puissance*, Ed. Gallimard, L. IV, pp. 580, 586, 591.

³⁰ *Le Concept d'Angoisse*, trans. Alcan, p. 51 *et seq.*, p. 210 *et seq.*

³¹ G. Marcel, *Etre et Avoir*, p. 179.

II

THE DRAMATIC CONCEPTION OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

IN its initial stages, every type of Existentialism is a philosophy of Man before becoming a philosophy of Nature. Now, whether or not it is a Christian type, it is always marked, I will not say by a certain pessimism—for pessimism (like optimism)¹ is a system applied to the world as exposed for show like a stage play, and not an expression of human experience—but by a particularly dramatic conception of man's life.

Kierkegaard had already taken his stand against a certain fashion of his day for appealing to the spirit of childhood and for encouraging the adult to adopt childlike serenity of heart. "Some people would like to try to transform the Christian way of life into a beautiful memory." The child has no conception of either the doubting or the liability to temptation or of the decision-making which constitutes the militant Christian. A similar campaign against the mawkishness of the Counter Reformation was one of the principal attractions which drew Pascal into the Jansenist ranks.²

Jaspers has traced the temptation of happiness through all the methods it uses to lie in wait for us, from economic Utopias to philosophic harmonies. From his point of view, the pursuit of freedom requires definitive antinomies and perpetual heart rendings. Man can only reject them by renouncing his fundamental position. To-day, at long last, we do see a wave of guilty conscience taking the place of the cosmic and economic optimism which marked the apogee of the Middle Classes in all their opulent triumph and narrow spiritual outlook. A new *mal du siècle*³

¹ G. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, p. 46.

² JANSENIST—from Cornelius Jansen, bishop of Ypres (d.1638). His doctrines concerning the means whereby man could obtain Divine Grace closely resembled those of Calvin. Jansenism was declared an heretical movement by the R.C. Church.—E.B.

³ "*Mal du siècle*"—there is no English direct equivalent. The phrase usually refers to the attitude of mind in France (and Europe) at the end of the eighteenth and during the first half of the nineteenth centuries, and which is reflected in the literature of the French "Romantic" period. Hamlet's phrase: "The time is out of joint!" almost exactly conveys the meaning.—E.B.

is producing gloomy humour and gloomy novels which seek justification in gloomy forms of Existentialism.

Some concepts recur, with varying degrees of congruity, in all these philosophies. They are related more by this common characteristic than by their latest forms of ontology.

THE FIRST CONCEPT: *The Contingency of the Human Being*

"WHEN I consider the tiny span of my life, which is swallowed up in the eternity which precedes and follows it, when I consider the tiny space that I occupy and can even see, lost as I am in the infinite immensity of Space which I know nothing about and which knows nothing about me, I am terrified and marvel to find myself here rather than there, for there is no reason at all why 'here' rather than 'there' or why 'now' rather than 'then.' Who put me there? By whose command and under whose direction were this time and this place destined for me?"

This is the theme, and wherever we heard it to-day we could not help hearing it with its full Pascalian orchestration. We should note that the contingency is twofold. Why, if one may ask, is it a contingency of man? And why am I, one isolated individual, *this* particular man, *here* and *now*?

As far as Christian Existentialism is concerned, my contingency has its roots in the original contingency of the free creative act and this contingency has a double application through the free mercy of the Incarnation and the Redemption. It reduces the religious horror which primitive mystery inspires through the spirit of goodness which it contains. But it leaves a sufficient amount of vagueness within the relationship in order that those of a certain type of mind should restrain the exercise of their goodness and that other types should modify the absolute contingency of man in regard to the creative act. The creative act itself may be defined as the absolute distance which separates man from God—the misery of man without God and his Divine Presence.

The modern breviary of this stern and uncompromising brand of Christianity is still *Preparation for Christianity*, which Kierkegaard wrote in 1850, at a time of complete religious Liberalism. "Christianity came into the world as something quite absolute and not, as human reason would like to believe, as a means of consolation."⁴ The Christian state of mind is a "terrifying state." It prevents the Christian from ever settling down or from organizing himself, even in a Christian way, in this world. The endeavours of a Christian community are a non-

⁴ *Ecole du Christianisme*, p. 81.

Christian attempt to deny the ever-precarious contingency of the Creation and the Incarnation, in order to set up in its place a reassuring law of immobility. "Wherever it seems, or whenever it is admitted, that there is a settled Christian community, we are very close to an attempt to set up a Church Triumphant, even if this term is not mentioned, because the Church Militant is a development, whereas a settled Christian community does not *develop*; it *is*."⁵ Thus, by the act of hunting for the fundamental contingency of our human state, human wisdom constantly submits to the saddest expedient of all: "that of betraying Christianity in order to defend it."⁶

As far as the non-Christian Existentialist is concerned, the contingency of existence no longer assumes the nature of an exciting mystery, but that of complete irrationality and plain absurdity. Man is a stark, staring fact. He *is there—just like that*—without any explanation. This is what Heidegger and Sartre would call his *factness*. Each of us in turn *is there (Befindlichkeit)*, there, now!

"Why, 'there,' rather than 'here'?"

"Nobody knows—it's quite idiotic!"

When he does awake to consciousness and to life, he is *already there*; he didn't ask for this—it is just as if someone had thrown him there!

"Who?"

"Nobody!"

"Why?"

"No reason at all!"

Such is the idea of our fundamental state, the all-inclusive idea, beyond which there is nothing. I wake in the middle of a journey in a tale told by an idiot. One is reminded of "we have embarked," of the *Homo Viator*. Yet, on one side, invisible breezes guide the ship in distress; on the other side is the inexorable drift which banishes all hope. This notion is so obscurantist that Sartre explains it by a new shade of meaning whose ontological scope is unlimited: the human being is *unwanted*. His inexcusable stupidity is a hindrance just like absurdity. At this stage one is not an idiot. I am not at my ease either in a dense crowd or in a deserted spot, but only in a place where there is sufficient room and sufficient signposts. When the feeling of well-being disappears, it seems that sensibility swings like a magnetised needle from the sensation of suffocation to the sensation of emptiness.

This absurd and exaggerated conception of being is represented in

⁵ *Ecole du Christianisme*, p. 258.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

Heidegger's works by the feeling of our complete *abandonment* in what he calls the nothingness of manifestation, the "eternal silence of infinite space." It is as if I am tossed aside by this nothingness, without any consideration or protest, into some forgotten corner of the universe. This does not occur, once and once only through my coming into the world; every moment increases this sense of abandonment by handing me over defenseless to the hostile world. It fills me with the strangeness which surrounds me and even deprives me of that warm intimacy with myself, and consequently despair enters into what was seemingly so friendly.⁷

As far as the philosophers we are dealing with are concerned, the Existential factor always takes precedence over the critical factor. One leads us to the other.

THE SECOND CONCEPT: *The Impotence of Reason*

THIS is the perfect example of the Pascalian concept. Pascal develops it at times to the point of challenge.

There is among men neither truth nor justice; custom and power take their places and eventually become hallowed. "We are nothing but a combination of lying, duplicity and contradictions of ourselves, and we conceal things from ourselves and masquerade in front of ourselves."⁸ Everyone is in a world of illusion—common sense just the same as philosophy, scholars just the same as simple folk. It is a feature of the progress of Christian Existentialism thus to stretch scepticism to the extreme limit in order to shake wisdom out of its complacency, and to reawaken the passion for the Cross. It is willing to do this even at the risk of re-establishing for the second time that state of minimum natural law without which there is no longer any safeguard against absurdity.

Here, Kierkegaard, with his gnashing turn of mind, and always liable to over-excite his religious absolutism, kept himself constantly on the verge of paradox. This is a decisive word. It has an ontological importance. It is not that eternal and fundamental truth is in itself paradoxical; it is so only in so far as it concerns an existing being.⁹ Strictly speaking, paradox is the essential basis of religious harmony and can be evoked by analogy with everything else.¹⁰ But the Existential side of Kierkegaard is swallowed up by the religious side. In this

⁷ On this concept of strangeness, see: *The Stranger*, a novel by Camus.

⁸ *Pensées*, p. 377.

⁹ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 135.

¹⁰ *Le Génie et l'Apôtre*, §1.

ubiquitous field, in which eternity meets time, there is no room for unequivocal assertions and logical connexions. These presuppose concepts which man's intelligence can cope with and involve an immanent liaison between antecedents and consequences. When the concept of eternity bursts into our thinking and acting it thereby creates a sort of electric storm which demagnetises all functioning of the mind. If, according to Hegel, system is the ultimate result of all scientific knowledge about creations of the mind, then revelations vouchsafed to the mind by means of transcendence can only be expressed in a new way. They must be expressed as a mixture of knowledge and non-knowledge, as something which stimulates investigation rather than something which is absolutely certain. The paradox is precisely this. It bursts forth at the meeting-point of eternity and historicity, of the Infinite and the finite, of hope and despair, of the transrational and the rational, of the inexpressible and the articulate. It insolently breaks all our installations in the sub-human: logical immanence,¹¹ æsthetic indifference, moral comfort. It enforces itself by its stern power. Let no man try to apologise for it or to throw any light on it. As Jean Wahl rightly says, there is only one single valid explanation of the Kierkegaardian paradox; it lies in grasping more and more firmly the fact that it is a paradox. It gives no reasons for doubt; it silences doubt. It does not invite the mind to take a step forward, to advance, but to leap forward. It is associated with giving offence and with defiance.¹² It makes itself offensive in the name of transcendence. It is a concept which Jaspers is to take up, and which we find again in Chesterton's theological eulogy of humour.

We find in theology and in Christian philosophy precedents for this dialectic of ignorance which are farther away from and more extreme than Pascal's conceptions. To go even farther back, Socratic ignorance appears to Kierkegaard as a first sketchy attempt at the Christian paradox, on the occasions when, like Nietzsche, he ceases to look upon Socrates as the father of Rationalism. Job against his enemies; Abraham going beyond the combined protestations of instinct and morality, are examples of other historical figures who herald it. But it is only in conjunction with real transcendence that the paradox definitely establishes itself in the centre of human consciousness. The *credo quia absurdum*,¹³ which is better known than clearly understood, exhibits here its non-absurd

¹¹ IMMANENCE—IMMANENT: Remaining within, inherent, indwelling. In reference specifically to God: pervading, present throughout the universe.—E.B.

¹² *Miettes philosophiques*, Ed. Gallimard, p. 99 *et seq.*, p. 117.

¹³ I believe that because it is absurd.

sense. Chestov¹⁴ connects Kierkegaard's concepts with this concept of Tertullian, a theological epitome of a sort of paleo-Existentialism: "The Son of God was crucified; this is not a shameful thing, for the very reason that it is shameful; and the Son of God is dead; this is even more credible because it is silly; and is buried and is arisen from the dead; this is true because it is impossible." This same mixture of understanding and non-understanding is the core of the Pascalian notion of incomprehensibility: "It is incomprehensible that God does not exist." Positive assurance about mental convictions, or rather, the chief act of faith, is, as far as Reason is concerned, a type of antinomy,¹⁵ and its solidity comes from the mutual impulsion which is provided by the two extremes of the antinomy. We see that *all Existentialist philosophy is essentially a dialectical philosophy*. According to its latest form of ontology, this dialectic is revealed in historical development or in transcendent relationships, or, even better, in a synthesis of the two. Metaphysical short-circuiting, logical super-tension, surprise, and unexpected reconciliation are to be the modern methods of approach. For the dialectic method to be possible, the tension to which the terms in question are submitted must not exceed the degree of elasticity beyond which there could only be rejection of all intellectual thought, and, consequently, of all reflective existence.

It is doubtful whether Kierkegaard has not exceeded this degree, and is, to this extent, unworthy of the title of *non possumus* which his present-day non-Christian followers give him. Pascal, on the contrary, carries the dialectic to its logical limits but never loses his grip on it. The incomprehensible is not the absurd.¹⁶ "Nothing is *absolutely* true . . . We can have neither truth nor goodness except in part-measure and only when they are mixed with evil and falsehood."¹⁷ But, within the factor of ambivalence, a power, and, what is more, an inward enlightenment, struggles against the determinative effect of ambivalence: "We are unable to prove anything, but this inability is proof against any kind of dogmatism. We have a conception of truth which is proof against any sort of Pyrrhonism."¹⁸

Something seems to tell us that it is absurd that there should be anything absurd, and that, nevertheless, the absurdity of the world is not

¹⁴ *Kierkegaard et la philosophie existentielle*, p. 152.

¹⁵ ANTINOMY—A contradiction or inconsistency between two laws or principles.—E.B.

¹⁶ *Pensées*, p. 420.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

¹⁸ PYRRONISM—A form of scepticism. From Pyrrho, c. 300 B.C.—E.B.—*Pensées*, p. 395.

the result of an investigation but the expression of a resolve which is no less determined than that of reason.

On this narrow base, a philosophy of impotence may be evolved. Without it, one could only maintain the impotence of philosophy—in which case there could be no further argument.

THE THIRD CONCEPT: *The Bounding-Leap of the Human Being*

HERE, we touch on one of the least-understood paradoxes of Existentialism. This philosophy of heart-broken man, or, as it sometimes is, of despairing man, is not something designed to assuage his unhappiness—quite the contrary. Starting with an equally depressing outlook, Epicureanism suggests to man a happy retreat into the margin of life, a sort of soporific suppression of vital energy. Existentialism, at the opposite extreme, confronts man with his unhappiness. While Pascal considers man as the feverish seeker after diversion, and Nietzsche thinks of him as the creator of values and power, he represents something else as well for Heidegger and Jaspers. He is a *power to be*, an impulsion, a bounding-leap (*Aufsprung*, *Absprung*), a *being-in-advance-of-himself* (*sich-vorweg-sein*). It is this movement which they call his transcendence. But, for Jaspers, the human being tends to extend beyond human existence; for Heidegger, there is nothing else but the world of man, and he is there, thrust outside of himself and in front of himself without any change of world. In the first case, as Jean Wahl suggests, one really should speak of *transcendence*. To remove a constant source of ambiguity, we should prefer to refer to the second *processus* by the name of *transcendence*. In this sense, the existent is always something more than what he is (immediately), even though he is not yet what he shall be. Sartre would say that he is the “being who is not what he is and who is what he is not.” Heidegger proposes this prospective conception of existence in opposition to the idea of the inertia, and the complete determinability (according to the classical conception of *existentia*), of matter, or at the very least, of the degrading picture that is often painted of it. The human being is not what the eternal and immutable law of matter has decreed that he should be; he is what he has decided to be, (*self-determination*). He could not, therefore, rightly be fitted into any abstract definition or made to conform with any nature anterior to his existence; *he is his existence*, he is what he makes himself. His moods are not permanent possessions which he owns, but ways of living in reality, each of which in turn occupies his whole attention and carries him forward to the great adventure of being himself.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the existent is neither constantly nor quite entirely this creative bounding-leap. There is inertia in being. It leads Heidegger to distinguish two things: One is a *crude existent* (the *Seinde*), a thing reduced to "there is," a chaotic nonentity without powers of determination—in so far as the ordinary designation is not already applicable. The other is a *project* which perpetually keeps its distance in respect of this crude existent.

We are now concerned to find out what this bounding-leap means. It must be realized that, in so far as power of reflexion and power of expansion are concerned, it seems, at first sight, like a considerable enrichment of the human being as the result of the relationship between the crude existent and passive and static existence. It would seem, therefore, to be the revelation of a state of super-being in the midst of being. This is what was meant by the old ontological test; it is the type of intuition which Descartes used again in his proof of the existence of God through the idea of the perfection which is in us being one of the manifestations of the existence of Perfection. Furthermore, as the result of the Existential analysis of human disquietude, or the Blondelian method of immanence, as a technique of approach to transcendence, it becomes the key to the Pascalian *apologia*. In all these outlooks, disquietude, no matter how voracious it may be, is revived by an abundance of being.

Sartre's paradox, previously implied in Heidegger's works, consists in creating out of this movement of being, not the effect of accomplishment, but the effect of impotence. It represents the crude existent; it represents existence only as regards the amount of contingency and absurdity it contains; it is *being-in-oneself*, which contains a sort of fulness. Yet, it is a dead sort of fulness, a fulness of death. Being-in-oneself is what it is in a stupid way, with no recoil upon itself and without any over-extension in advance of itself. It is self-centred, meaningless to itself, huge, ingenuous, too solid, and, in the opinion of the world, unwanted and superfluous—whence arises Nausea, that vague and stifling uneasiness which all those who are not Dirty Beasts experience on meeting it. The human-being, the conscious being, the *being-for-oneself*, is not a super-being, but a "decompression of being." He does not fully coincide with himself; he introduces into the concept of being the idea of a certain amount of play, and even the idea of "playing a double game,"¹⁹ falseness along with freedom. But, this decompression is not

¹⁹ "Play" (*le jeu*), in the sense of "a limited amount of free movement between parts." There seems to be some "academic" humour implied in the pun, "*le double-jeu*," which I translate as "playing a double game."—E.B.

possible until a crack has developed in being, a crack into which nothingness worms its way.²⁰ The establishment of being thus constitutes a decline, "a gap in being"; it creates a doubt about being; it constitutes a victory for nothingness. As a matter of fact, it is by a singular paradox that this doctrine has launched the word "Existentialism" on its career. It would really be more apposite to speak of it as non-Existentialism.

This prospective conception of existence is closely connected with the importance which all Existentialists attach to duration of time. A doctrine of temporality is inseparable from any Existential philosophy. Kierkegaard places the emphasis on the moment, on the actual point of impact between eternity and time, that is, on the moment of Existential decision, on the atomic unit of eternity and not on the unstable atomic unit of time, such as the moment of pleasure.²¹ For Kierkegaard and Jaspers, time, like being, is a fulness. Heidegger emphasizes the call of the future coupled with its tragic urgency, for this call is the call of death. As far as Sartre is concerned, no matter how prospective it may be, duration of time is irrevocably hollow and rotten. The past is what is over and done with; it represents the degeneration from the for-oneself into the petrified immobility of the in-oneself. The present represents the perpetual flight from that death which is close on our heels; it does not represent the bringing of perpetual freshness, as it does for Bergson, or the promise of eternity, as it does for Kierkegaard. It means a rout in the face of the hostility of being.

Thus, the ontological bounding-leap assumes opposite meanings in the two Existentialist traditions.

THE FOURTH CONCEPT: *The Instability of the Human Being*

THE fundamental instability of my contingency leads to the perpetual instability of my existence. It does not recognize any definite gain; it is *repeated bringing into play*, which is to be done over and over again. I must be continuously reassuming it and taking it up again from the beginning. I myself am a frail existent lost in the bitter ocean of infinity; I am the weak and lonely god without whom this spontaneous creation of myself by myself is liable at any moment to sink in the depths of nothingness. Or else, because I am maintained in existence by the action of God, I am continuously subject to His decree.

In all these philosophies, the concept of instability and the concept of energy are closely associated. They are at the opposite pole from

²⁰ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 119-21.

²¹ *Concept d'angoisse*, p. 140-1.

over-elaborate and resolute philosophies like those of Leibniz or Spinoza, and they have, moreover, some sort of athletic and Promethean quality, even at times when they drive us to despair. Nevertheless, they are moving in different directions.

For Heidegger, my instability is indefinitely equal to itself; it is inexorable and invests this fact with a monotonous and despairing fatalism. For Jaspers, the drama is more highly-coloured. Existence is a conquest. "Energetic being" is his conception of the essence of being. Its own particular rhythm is *crisis*. It is a perpetual state of flowing and reflowing, of reverse and triumph. I can obtain rest and quiet only by enduring anguish; I can gain freedom only by fighting for it; I can gain faith only by enduring my own shame. The spiritual life of the existent is a perpetual storm of conflicts of ideas whose various aspects sometimes smash each other to smithereens and sometimes diverge to the point of rupture. The rhythm of existence must maintain the diverse components in it by the exercise of a painful, but undetermined tension. The *effort* necessary to hold together a personality which is in constant danger of disintegration summarizes the chief experience of the Biranian *cogito*.

The dominant feeling in this state of affairs, which is common to every member of the group extending from Pascal to Sartre, is *anguish*. Now, so much stress has been laid on this that an ontological feeling which Existentialists often associate with it has, perhaps, been left in the background; this is *frenzy*.²² We have drawn attention earlier to the two tangible forms from which the feeling of fundamental contingency is concretely synthesized. These are suffocation and the feeling of emptiness. Anguish and frenzy are continually crossing each other's paths. Frenzy occupies an important place in the Pascalian phraseology. Kierkegaard couples it with anguish and represents anguish as "the syncope²³ of freedom." We may, perhaps, just as he does, understand this metaphor to convey something deeper than mere anguish. Anguish would seem to be an ordinary symptom, an ailment, an accidental ailment. Frenzy simultaneously includes the elements of seduction and revulsion, as well as being a source of danger and source of protection. It expresses that ambiguous meaning which Kierkegaard gives to the word anguish better than the actual word anguish itself does. In so far

²² "Frenzy"—The French text has "*le vertige*" which may mean anything from "mild physical giddiness" to "madness." It is obvious from the page above that there is no term or phrase inclusive of all Kierkegaard meant by the term which M. Mounier identifies with "*le vertige*." It would seem to imply some sort of subdued excitement associated with physical giddiness and with a feeling of misgiving and challenge.—E.B.

²³ SYNCOPE—(medical term). A sudden loss of consciousness.—E.B.

as it indicates freedom, anguish is a manifestation of the perfection of human nature.²⁴ Again, it does not exactly represent languor so much as a sort of gentle swooning tendency caused by excess of happiness, or, perhaps, a sort of accelerated exhilaration as opposed to the dialectic slowing-down of energy on the solid ground of synthesis. But, in so far as it keeps wrapping the existent up in this frenzy, as opposed to freedom, which is an expansion out of such bonds,²⁵ it also represents the highest degree of egocentricity.²⁶ Kierkegaard thus replies in advance to those who were later to denounce, in so far as this emphasis on anguish is concerned, its indication of the breakdown of Middle Class philosophy. It is not denied that, according to the scheme by which the philosophy of anguish degenerates into a mere sociological slogan, it has tendencies favourable to the onset of decadence. Every human quality is ambivalent in virtue of the very structure of human existence. But this care which Kierkegaard took, precisely in order to explain ambivalence, necessarily eliminated all consideration of its opposite.

We shall find again the same concern expressed by Heidegger. Anguish, properly so-called, is evidence of the authentic nature of the human state. It is recognizable in that it is not the anguish of any particular object, but the anguish arising from the stark and brutal realization of our being-in-the world, "of the worldliness of the world in its pure state." It arises from the sense of our remissness and our march towards death. It is a complete contradiction of that anaemic and petit-bourgeois feeling of solitude, and, as such, it arises from a reaction against petit-bourgeois dailiness in which the being is comfortably settled amidst his reassuring surroundings, and in which his property, his common sense and his natural goodness hide his remissness from him. It is a feeling of superior assurance mixed with cosmic uneasiness, rather than an intimate dissonance. But, this pure form of the concept, which demands a rigid asceticism, is rare. Anguish usually degenerates into the meaning of fear, that is to say, into fear of particular objects. Yet, at the same time, this sort of fear wards off anguish and gives us a feeling of reassurance; naturally, it is better for the ordinary man to know he has a sworn and visible enemy than for him to be subject to the intangible horror which lies hidden in the very midst of ourselves. Nevertheless, the fearful state of mind does not sustain this fundamental anguish for very long. It very quickly disperses it throughout the thousand and one shelters of material and moral security. Heidegger seems resigned to

²⁴ *Concept d'angoisse*, p. 121.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

a sort of obstinate abandonment of all hope, and would, therefore, lump all doctrines of salvation together as having been evolved in these fear-shelters against anguish. He would accuse Luther or St. Augustine, as well as Kierkegaard, of this betrayal.

In the stream of Christian inspiration, instability and anguish do not simply represent weakness and nothingness. Both represent the ransom of our chief source of strength, freedom and the right to decide. *Decision*, according to Kierkegaard, represents the privileged moment of existence. It runs through the whole of his thinking, just as worry about totalness haunts the mind of Heidegger. The very titles of Kierkegaard's books exemplify his breathless tempo: *Either . . . Or, Guilty . . . Not Guilty*. For him, *decision* is the act which engenders personality. Then, while the balancing of ideas leaves us still on the surface of ourselves, decision sets in motion the vast resources of personality. It is as if we emerge purified from it.²⁷ There comes over a man who has made a decision once or more times in his life, just as there comes over the man who has been in love, an unmistakable radiance. It is not extended to cover the wrong decision which does not benefit us. It would even seem likely that the choice of the decision, as a principle of life, has a guiding value and reduces the chances of error. "Once you bring a man to a cross-road, and there is nothing else for him to do but choose, then he will make the right decision."

The guiding principle of a man confronted with a choice can only be that of a being who is *willing to take a risk*.

"Am I quite sure," you will ask, "I, who am risking such a stake, that there is such an eternal prize, or even one which, on the evidence of history, is likely, at the end of the game?"

"If you were certain of it," answers Kierkegaard, "it still wouldn't put you in a state of eternal harmony; you would merely be making a gilt-edged investment! Eternal life—others would call it 'heroic life'—is the prize which can only be won by risking absolutely everything!"²⁸ "What a grand thing it is to be happily disporting yourself on the surface of a pool seventy thousand fathoms deep, when you are surrounded by thousands and thousands of human life-savers! Swimming close to the shore along with other bathers doesn't make you a religious man."

Such is the gist of what Pascal meant by his "gamble";²⁹ such is

²⁷ *Ou bien* . . . Ed. Gallimard, p. 472.

²⁸ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 288.

²⁹ "Gamble"—Pascal claimed that, even without any "faith," a man would reasonably be entitled, on mere material observation, to "take a bet" on the fact that there is a God.—E.B.

the gist of what Christian Existentialists mean by "freedom," and, similarly, it is the gist of the Heideggerian notion of "risk all, lose all." We are now touching on one of the points—there are many of them—at which Christian pathos meets the pathos of absurdity. Neither the Christian nor the Atheist enjoys a monopoly of the drama. Pascal and Nietzsche—Tartuffe and Homais;³⁰ each has his tragic heroes and his clowns as well.

THE FIFTH CONCEPT: *Estrangement*

IF it is a fact that the philosophers we are concerned with regard human existence as the apex of existence, then they regard man, this Prince of Nature, as nothing less than the lord of his domain. In the words of Pascal, he is an uncrowned king.

One cannot discuss fundamental estrangement from a Christian standpoint. The very essence of religious history is to reconcile man to himself and with Nature. Sinful-Man, is, however, the victim of an accidental estrangement, the estrangement which separates him from God because of Sin (and the results of Sin) committed by the whole of creation including himself. The emphasis on moral evil is a tendency common to all types of Christian Existentialism. Moral evil puts us all in a permanent state of estrangement. Moreover, Christian Existentialism also emphasizes the distracting and disassociating properties of moral evil just as strongly as it emphasizes its power of defilement.

We are acquainted with the importance Pascal attached to this concept. This oppressive type of Christianity goes still farther. If ever there was a revelation of the Christian attitude which laid itself open to the Feuerbach critique, then it is that offered by this type of Christianity, which develops its arguments to the Nth degree in order to glorify Transcendence, the relationship of man to God, which exemplifies his dependence on Him. It reveals so skilfully the secret, jealous and authoritarian nature of the Divinity (and it does it in such human terms under the pretext of not humanizing Him) that it conveys the impression that everything the Creator gains, he gains *at the expense of* His creation. Those who regard man as being robbed for the benefit of the Creator thus have the way open for them to denounce God as being merely a

³⁰ TARTUFFE—chief character in Moliere's (seventeenth century) play of the same name. He represents hypocrisy and other abuses associated with those who take advantage of "religious revival" movements. HOMAIS—a character in Flaubert's (nineteenth century) novel, *Madame Bovary*. He is a little village chemist with an immense store of self-taught erudition who is a professed Atheist. He represents the French petit-bourgeois type of mind.
—E.B.

further projection of man himself. As far as the mainstream of Roman Catholic tradition is concerned, it has always avoided this fatal tendency by shielding God's creatures, even though they be burdened with sin, from the natural menaces of autonomy and accountability. At the same time, it has kept the relationships of reciprocal generosity subservient to those of authority and dependence. This does not mean that, if transcendence cannot be completely understood by God's creature, transcendence may not partially reveal itself to him under the guise of a form of domination and constraint; and it is this aspect of experience which most obviously distinguishes the particular tradition we are referring to here.

This concept of estrangement, which, from the Christian standpoint, so categorically denies the Incarnation of the Transcendent Being in human being, is, by contrast, a prominent feature of the Atheist branch of Existentialism. The concept of the bounding-leap of the human being, which, as the result of Heidegger's ideas, seemed at first to have initiated a triumphant philosophy, is a shackled and curbed bounding-leap. It is, as he says, tuned to the pitch of a peculiar instrument. One frequent piece of imagery, especially in Jaspers' works, refers to the human being as *surrounded, captivated and hemmed in* on all sides by being which to him is opaque or hostile, and which threatens him because of its nearness and its irruption.

Every philosophical attitude is adopted from one particular angle, and, although this does not necessarily lessen its importance, it may worry and betray the thinker who adopts it. Now, bearing this in mind, we must make one observation at this point: Most Existentialists, because of their emotional susceptibility to the intense perception of being, are a very worried lot, and it seems that they suffer from susceptibility to the *encroachment* of being on the *subjective* receiver. They experience this encroachment as a sort of *otherness*.

Perhaps this fundamental susceptibility has led bolder spirits to discover the value of attachment in the same way as some defect of expression or style often compels us to set to work to correct it. We immediately discern this move to avoid being surrounded in Kierkegaard. There was his backing out of his betrothal, his backing out of the ministry, and his revulsion to the very idea of marriage and clerical life which arose as the result of his dialectical gyrations and of the ironical attitude which isolates a man from his fellows. This obsession is nowhere else so evident as in the works of Sartre. It appears in his description of the being-in-oneself, which is so "importunate" and plausible, and which perpetually

threatens to *clog* the mobility of the for-oneself. Here, the vitally important part which the concept (at once physical and ontological) of *viscosity* plays in his Existential psycho-analysis is clearly shown. "Viscosity" is the ontological horror experienced as the result of contact. In the viscous state, the other party seems at first to yield to my contact, to my sovereignty—but only all the better to gobble up me, the child of me!"³¹ And so, finally, it dispossesses me of myself. Now, the in-oneself is always so ready to gobble up the for-oneself that my whole life is threatened by viscosity. Sometimes, viscosity is called "The Past," sometimes "Other people," sometimes "The World." It is just like being in a paranoid condition: everything outside me is a threat directed against me. When the feeling of estrangement also develops an equally irritable consciousness, it is time to ask whether ontological analysis is acting on its own, or whether those feelings of appropriation which, for beings of powerful sensibility, are one of the aspects of egocentricity, have not begun to meddle in the business.

Here, the negation of the concept of transcendental being would find one of its carnal bonds, in the same way as those who support the concept betray their need for company and consolation. Ontology must be constantly purged of these complexes masquerading as spiritual aspirations.

THE SIXTH CONCEPT: *Conclusive-Finality and the Imminence of Death*

AT the same time as it favours a sort of aggressive cheerfulness, Existentialism believes that man is aiming at an unattainable goal.

For the Christian, this unattainability is only temporary, and Divine Grace can place it within our reach. But, while some learned doctors, such as those of the Franciscan or the Salesian Schools, claim that the whole universe is working to facilitate understanding of and access to Divine Grace, the theologians of the Existential line, on the contrary, complain of the incompetence of Nature, and disregard the bounty and preciousness of the Divine Gift. They paint Original Sin in the blackest colours, and, in short, do everything possible to present the course of our lives, not as the first rough sketch for an immortal masterpiece, but as a dismal failure from beginning to end. For them, death is not an end—quite the contrary. It is the only possible beginning. According

³¹ Here, there is a little "academic" jesting: First of all, the sentence is based on the dialogue in *Little Red Ridinghood*, with "gobble me" substituted for the original "gobble you." The phrase, "my child" (my dear), which is a nominative-of-address in the original dialogue, is here made to refer to "myself" being the child of "me."—E.B.

to their books, however, death is not converted to something brighter because of the transfiguration which follows it. The supernatural means nothing to me, not even the tiniest ray of perceptible light finds its way down from it and penetrates into the attachment I have for things of this world. If I am an "unbeliever," death means to me, in my present state, the stupid and terrifying necessity which undermines all pleasures. If I am a "believer," it is the ever-imminent ultimatum of detachment or rejection which thrusts its injunction against every single second of my life—*dies iste*, rather than *dies ille*.

One only has to look up Pascal. Everything he says tells of the narrowness of life and of the little amount of time left for the choice to be made, when contrasted with the immensity of eternity; everything he says reminds us of the imminence of the end. To turn away from neglect to contemplate death is the solemn duty of Existentialism. Kierkegaard makes the least possible delay about it. But, here again, we find pre-occupation about death and suicide, and an even sterner train of thought, haunting the works of Jaspers, as well as those of Gabriel Marcel.³² Assuming a more classically Christian balance of thought, the latter stresses the shamefulness of a philosophy which imagines the being of man as a future state, and which accepts as the ultimate life an eventuality which converts it into the absolute past. It is not, as some people claim, evidence which can lead us to it, but simply and solely an active negation of a great part of experience of eternity, which all love and fidelity constitute.³³

Here, as elsewhere, Jaspers takes up a position which cannot be classed either as the Christian attitude or as purely Agnostic. The highest kind of life for the existent is a *restricted* life. It cannot implant its experience on being except by limiting it on all sides; it finally puts a ceiling to *limit-situations*, and the first of these is my actual state in the world; several more of these are experienced in death, in suffering, in fighting and in sinning. These latter situations are just the same sort of impasses at the end of Existential experience; they never let themselves be dominated by the mind; they are like a wall against which we hurl ourselves.³⁴ The empirical being which is within me, that which builds up knowledge, sensations and the will to live, tries to escape them, but it keeps them in a state of dull unrest. I can neither escape from them nor clear up their mystery. In the very act of curbing my energy they,

³² Who stresses the importance of the concept in his book : *Du refus* . . . p. 100.

³³ *Homo Viator*, p. 207, *et seq.*

³⁴ See Gabriel Marcel's excellent analysis in *Du refus* . . . p. 302.

nevertheless, offer it the only assignable direction, even if this is done with irresolvable incertitude.

Such is the nature of death. It threatens only empirical existence; it loses its grip on transcendent existence. Moreover, for this hope to retain the importance of Existential risk and attraction we must accept it in its entirety; this means that we must assume the very great improbability of any form of personal immortality co-existing with present experience.

Let us pass quickly over the Christian boundary and this No Man's Land that Jaspers occupies. With the advent of Heidegger, the finality of the human being becomes absolute and fundamental. There is no completion and no totalness to life. It is, therefore, absolutely impossible for man ever to become or to be the master of his existence on any historical basis. Every life leads inevitably towards death. Death is no accident; it is not something external, as trite opinion would like to think. It is our greatest potentiality. Human existence is *being-for-the-purpose-of-dying*. Dying my death is, in fact, the only thing nobody else can do for me. My death is my most personal potentiality; it is the most authentic, and, at the same time, the most absurd potentiality. It does not come at the end of my life; it is present at every moment of my life, in the very act of my living. I am constantly trying to forget about it, to escape from it, to misrepresent it to myself by means of such things as indifference, diversion or religious myths. Living authentically, on the other hand, is living in conformity with this concept of life: to live in constant expectation of death and its imminent possibility; to look squarely at this thing which is our fellow during every moment of our lives. Then we have attained "freedom in the face of death." Dürer's *Soldier of Death*, which is Nietzsche's favourite bit of symbolism, is the chief specimen of Heideggerian anthropology.

Sartre is to protest against this macabre cheerfulness. He sees in this attempt to integrate death with the being of life yet another unauthentic attempt—in accordance with the very phraseology of Heidegger—to revive death in the midst of humanity and to prolong its fundamental contingency. Of course, for Heidegger, death does not represent, as it does for Idealism, a beautiful harmony of resolution in the form of a melody. But its intimate connexion with æsthetic life humanizes it, all the same. Now, it is absolute contingency; it cannot give any meaning to life; strictly speaking, we cannot delay it. It, on the other hand, can only bring complete meaning to life by brutally cutting short a future which has its meaning all in the past. Moreover, it petrifies my being

into that state of immobility from which nothing more can be produced; it hands me over defenseless to the gaze and to the judgment of other people; it represents my total dispossession; it is nothing else but a concrete concept. "It is absurd for us to be born; it is absurd for us to die."³⁵ Death is not the end of my life; it avoids me; I avoid it. It also, just like me, is flung there, just like that. "We are always dying buckshee." It is even more correct to say of Sartre than of Heidegger, and, *a fortiori* of Jaspers, that "the story of any particular life is the story of a reverse,"³⁶ because the Jasperian conception of reverse does include a vague sort of promise; the Heideggerian conception of reverse may, nevertheless, foster an intimate spiritualization of finality. Here reverse appears in its fundamental state of being an absurdity from which there is no escape.

THE SEVENTH CONCEPT: *Solitude and the Secret State*

WE have already examined the fundamental solitude of existence: the relative isolation of sinful humanity (as the result of Original Sin) from God, the hidden and still; or the primitive isolation in the heart of nothingness. It now remains for us to examine the various aspects of this congenital solitude.

Although it ultimately means joyfulness at getting some friendly response, Kierkegaard's description of it is no less grim. So steep and so general is the descent into the unauthentic life, that to become an existent means to move towards the exceptional. Sometimes, we hear the very words of Nietzsche coming from the melancholy Dane. Let the herd go its way, and let the Exceptional Being climb his mountain. "The universal truths have always been evolved in the desert," says Zarathustra. We are aware of how Nietzsche personally arranged this "fearful experiment" with absolute solitude, even refusing to be "the follower of his own followers," and making solitude appear to be not only a tragic state but also an active virtue. There is, however, one fundamental difference between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard: for Nietzsche, the exceptional (thing) is predetermined and must contain the elements of a temporal aristocracy; as far as the Christian thinker is concerned, each of us is called upon to live the exceptional life, and its law has nothing to do with the way the world is organized. But the state of the lonely existent is revealed here and there under very closely related guises. The chief cause of suffering for the existent is the impossibility of transmitting experience of existence. Direct transmission is possible

³⁵ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 631.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

only for the man who lives in the relative state. It manifests itself in the objective relations of exteriorized life. Even in the moral life (Kierkegaard's "ethical plane") we can to some extent rob our inwardness in order to express it in an outward intermediary; this explains the generality of the law by which we come into contact with all moral beings.

But there is no way of adequately expressing what is meant by absolute existence. There, the individual absolutely assimilates himself to the absolute, and, generally speaking, from then on he only relatively assimilates himself to the absolute.

The Knightly Warrior for the Faith cannot arrive at an understanding of anyone, just as he cannot help anyone. Between him and others there can only be the call of the Unexampled to the Unexampled. It may be said that he has all the freedom of the children of God. But that sort of freedom must not be confused with that of baby birds and roving spirits.³⁷ That sort of freedom is not easy to obtain. At the same time as it involves renunciation of association with pleasure, it also involves renunciation of the consolation that comes from performance of duties which can only be performed by a common effort. All the Knightly Warrior for the Faith does is "to put himself completely and utterly into a state of absolute isolation."³⁸ Of course, at the same time as he is writing down such prescriptions, Kierkegaard is writing certain extensions of meaning into them. He says somewhere else³⁹ that, if the exception is not part of the general, then, at least, it does make the same irruption there. The well-founded exception does explain more things than the general, despite its exceptional nature. Although it is an achievement quite distinct from ethical generality, it is, nevertheless, an offshoot of it and reflects it. Moreover, the latter secretly loves its offspring. But these reservations only serve to extend laterally a philosophy which has always been shy of synthesis of any spontaneous movement and shrunk unwillingly from the inaccessible. They also project it on to a Christian background.

What is general is what is manifest. The existent is the hidden being. In place of the *Tu es vere Deus absconditus*,⁴⁰ Existential philosophy sets up a *Tu es vere homo absconditus*.⁴⁰ It also introduces one of its favourite concepts; the concept of the *secret state*. As far as this particular point is concerned, nobody else has kept so close to his master as Jaspers. For him, also, the existent is rigorously deprived of his direct communication. His statements and his answers are always

³⁷ *Crainte et tremblement*, p. 122.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁹ *La Répétition*, Alcan, p. 190.

⁴⁰ Verily, thou art the hidden God, Verily, thou art the hidden man.

ambiguous, secret and half-understood. In its other sense, the secret state is the reserve-land of being. The existent can never, by means of communication, give the objective indication of a route; at best, he can open it up and make an appeal to it. His pronouncement cannot be called communication; it is an *invocation*, an appeal from beyond an abyss.⁴¹ Similarly, the Existent of all existents, a personal God, can communicate with man only through an indirect channel, just as one existent can communicate with another existent only in an enigmatic and obscure sort of way. To the unbeliever who objects, on the ground of God's silence, one could only say, as Kierkegaard and Pascal do, that it is only because God does exist that He is a doubtful hypothesis. By definition, transcendence can only be approached through non-consciousness and by means of a gamble, alternating with challenge.

In the Heidegger-Sartre perspective, solitude becomes absolute, and the problem, at this stage, is to know whether or not it is radically changing its meaning and its being. We have already observed the inalienably cosmic nature of anguish. Gabriel Marcel notes that one is never alone except when confronted with some immensity in the very midst of some whole.⁴² Is absolute solitude, like absolute nothingness, a pseudo-concept, an untenable concept, which fattens on the very thing it denies just like the concept of absolute nothingness? Is it measurable without reference to an environmental presence, other than by transforming itself into its opposite, the concept of absolute fulfilment?

THE EIGHTH CONCEPT: *Nothingness*

WE have already stressed the paradox which, at the present time, is spreading a philosophy, bearing the name of Existentialism, which quite definitely postulates nothingness as the main fibre of existence. According to Sartre, the being of human reality cannot be classed as an ontological super addition but as a faultiness of being, as a gap in the completeness of being. It represents a sort of "nullity of extent" which, nevertheless, is immeasurable, and which is part of the make-up of being; it is a state of something not coinciding with itself. This gap is not a new positive state; it is *nothing*. Thus, it is through human reality that shortcomings appear in the world; it is itself a shortcoming; the existence of desire is sufficient proof of that. At the same time, however, it is a perpetual struggle towards accomplishment, towards a coincidence with oneself.

⁴¹ The word has been adopted by Gabriel Marcel for the title of one of his books, *Du refus à l'invocation*.

⁴² *Homo Viator*, p. 302.

But this energy is always being wasted; it aims at an unattainable fusion of being and consciousness, of fulness and energy, of the in-oneself and the for-oneself. We want to become the in-oneself, a total fulness, but we want to become this in the for-oneself manner, by resurgence and by making progress. We want to become gods. "Man is the being who aspires to be a god." "Man is basically a desire to be God."⁴³ Yet, "Everything goes on just as if the world, man, and man-in-the-world merely happened to realize that there was no God."⁴⁴

Again, human existence is by nature a vain existence, supporting a miserable consciousness.⁴⁵ This aimless movement is inspired by no aim. It is nothing but the flashback from the reflected thing to the reflector and from the reflector to the reflected thing. It is a sort of vast cosmic narcissism. The human being is never what he is, and, to an even greater extent, he never is what he will be or what he wants to be. He is what he is to such a negligible extent that he is always ahead of what he is, and can only accept what he is as a dead letter. It is a case of his having already been what he is far more than his being what he is now; it is a case of his suffering from a sort of syncope which he is quite unaware of. "Ahead of himself, behind himself, but never just himself."⁴⁶ The most spontaneous human existence is absolute deception. In a twofold attempt to objectify it and inwardize it, reflective consciousness tries to recover this being which has disappeared in the unity of one particular aspect. It really suffers a further reverse. It is already an aspect, and a rather chilly one too, especially as Sartre knows no other aspect. It emits a distorted reflexion which embeds psychical life in the past. It ascribes to the mobile and projective for-oneself a nature which is only an exposition of the in-oneself; it merely projects a lifeless shadow of the for-oneself. Consciousness brings me no farther forward. "Representation" is a fiction of philosophers; but this nothing, precisely because it is nothingness, is insurmountable.⁴⁷ Consciousness is "what is immediately unobtainable."⁴⁸ It is a further fundamental fraud.

All this is such absolute mockery that finally you wonder whether you ought to call it drama or farce. Thinkers and moralists are inspired by many exalted conceptions about the human state. Sartre postulates a much humbler one for us—the donkey and the carrot.

⁴³ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 654.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 717.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

This dismal reaction against the philosophy of happiness and human triumph which held the forefront during last century finds some explanation in the topsy-turvy condition of Europe after two exhausting wars which produced such unprecedented crises. But its roots lie much deeper than this.

From the Christian standpoint, it marks the end of a cycle which began with the Counter Reformation and has ended in the Radical camp. As far as religious sentiment, and frequently religious philosophy, too, were concerned, it was dominated by fear inspired by the dramatic appeal of Christianity and by religious Absolutism. Luther had degraded Nature and dehumanized religion to such an extent that people unconsciously began to experience and to think of and to organize Christianity as a gigantic insurance company insuring them against vital anguish. Of course, I am simplifying the description of a stream of thought which has wound its way through a tradition and a doctrine of long standing, but which has, nevertheless, given an outline of the whole picture, and which has overflowed in huge waves into religion, into religious art and into the average makeup of Christian communities. The heresies of Jansenism were an early reaction against this decadence. The Kierkegaardian and Pascalian prophecies still bear witness against it.

Of course, the problem started by the Counter Reformation still remains. Present-day Roman Catholic philosophy is less inclined than ever to abandon the concept, no matter what twist may be given to it, of a human nature and of a natural capacity for civilization, even though that capacity may be partly ineffective. But the spiritual and historical concern of this fundamental humanism is, of course, to purge itself of all the evils which bourgeois optimism have brought into it. An age in which urbanized civilization seems more capable than ever before of avoiding the lead given by the Churches, and even that given by Christianity itself, must surely drive Christian philosophy into the byway of "compulsory singularity." There, no doubt, lies the reason for the new craze for Christian Existentialism.

The other branch of Existentialism, the branch which no longer leads only to the tragic conception of life but to despair itself, clammers over the ruins left in the world by "the death of God" theory. In the vast expanses of the modern Western world, the Christian doctrine is no longer even challenged; it has ceased to be a subject for debate. It is accepted as a survival of a bygone age which must be tolerated along with the Paris Underground crush-barriers erected in 1900 or those uncomfortable old-fashioned buildings in which present-day public administrations

are housed. Whether you welcome this development or whether you deplore it, you cannot deny that it leaves a personal instability in the modern soul. Forces, in the form of powerful emotions, which at all times have supported man in the world and in the supernatural world, suddenly find themselves with nothing to support. Sometimes, they wrap themselves up in the "mysticisms" of sublimation, or of nationalism, or of racialism, or of communism. Sometimes, as in this case, they develop a sense of weariness with life, and sometimes they even start a "movement"—The Despairing Man's Movement. A future is then opened up for philosophies of absurdity and despair to such an extent that, after this present crisis is over, Western civilization will be without a new enthusiasm for life and a new human stability.

Such is the ambiguous nature of the Existentialist dramatic appeal. Plunging down to the well-springs of being, it brings up, sometimes a pathetic revival of existence, sometimes a frenzied nothingness. In either case, the tragic concepts of anguish, irrationality of experience, and presence of nothingness cannot re-echo the same theme; nor, in the end, can they mean the same thing.

On the Heidegger-Sartre axis, they postulate a sort of exciting licence for unresolved anguish, and for the melancholy mind, an ontological dolour. Of course, all this is mere book words. In a book published posthumously, Benjamin Fondane passionately declares that there is no need to dramatize human suffering; it is painfully obvious enough, as it is. Throughout the ages, it has been frequently ignored, and it has been ignored to such an extent in many philosophies of optimism that the part played by it in the basis of any reflexion about man has been too small to estimate.

But any philosophy which is essentially based on the rejection of systematization must be very careful not to begin systematizing its most startling discoveries. It is transformation to systematization which marks the leap-over from a distracted and obscurantist experience to the imperialism of absurdity and nothingness. Although he refrains from pronouncing moral judgment on the man who, according to his canons, is not living authentically, Heidegger tends to discredit any metaphysical point of view which supports extension of his nihilism. The vale of tears, that fantastic notion of spiritually-bankrupt Christendom, no longer suffices to represent life; there must be Gehenna, too. Kierkegaard is metaphorically excommunicated because, at the end of the darkness, he sees the dawn of resurrection. Do we have to go back to Sartre's analysis, then? Is it that this antipathy to being means only a new consciousness

of being, exclusive of that factor which Gabriel Marcel calls "the marriage-tie between man and life." ?

Here, to some extent, we go back to the Marxist critique: A good deal is said about attachment. But where does attachment offer us a grip? Attaching yourself to nothing, or being faithful to nothingness, or joyously embracing death or absurdity may, perhaps, provide an exciting exercise for the mind. It is to be feared, however, that such an exercise attracts only those minds which are destitute of original inspiration, and that it encourages raving rather than intellectual thinking. Man may create a void all round himself which penetrates into the very depths of his soul and yet may keep his love for finer things instead of falling under the influence of hack philosophers who, henceforward, become respectable members of the profession. But, he will find great difficulty in avoiding a sort of spiritual narcissism. Christianity has always been engaged in driving this morose narcissism back to its own confines. It has condemned excessive asceticism. It has dispelled from its convents the *tristitia* which used to lie in wait for its hermits. As far as Christianity was concerned all these were only lateral temptations. The new Pessimism introduces authority into the affair. The Activism which it postulates is an attitude of willing that its ontology should probe a little deeper. Now, this ontology itself is no less a product of the will. Heidegger does not deny the fact—Heidegger who claims that a philosopher never sets out to discover his philosophy but to verify it. At the root of all this, there is *an a priori project, a fundamental decision to look upon existence as inexorable*. There is no postulate, only a *rejection*.⁴⁹ This challenge to Existential happiness cannot be purely negative, it is true. But, in order to give it a positiveness, some qualification must first be put on the negation; the idea of its being pure negation must be rejected, but, at the same time, it must be accepted as representing challenge.

It is from then on, and only from then on, that the apparently discouraging aspects of the Existentialist dramatic appeal take on a positive meaning. Pascalian anguish gnaws at the heart and the soul no less painfully than the loneliness of the absurd state does. Despair pursues human existence right to the grave; possibly, it is associated with every pronouncement about the world; it has represented, to a far greater extent than all human pronouncements, the final *pronouncement* of Christ on the Cross.

When the frenzy caused by freedom and the frenzy caused by transcendence are abolished, spirituality is often destroyed, too. We find

⁴⁹ *Du refus . . . and Homo Viator, passim.*

ourselves back at the Kierkegaardian idea that despair is no ordinary state of mind; it is not a final residue. But it is a form of reality with varying degrees, or, if you prefer, a form of reality with several dimensions. Empirical despair, or soul-sickness (or intellectual-sickness), rests on the very basis of egocentric enjoyment (the aesthetic plane), and is a corrective to it. It is the sum-total of deception of our desires. But despair is something more than this mere phosphorescence of nothingness. If it is detached from desire and if it expresses the longing of the human being for being, it becomes a negative revelation of the Absolute, a dialectical phase of the process of our liberation. "Despairs with all his heart and soul . . . Whoever despairs, finds eternal man."⁵⁰ The enticement of despair leads to the making of the Existential decision. "One cannot despair without making the decision."⁵¹ In Existential perspective, despair takes the place that methodical doubting occupies at the start of the Cartesian philosophy. It, too, contains in its very denseness a sort of *ergo sum*, provided one is prepared to meet, underneath the finite despair, that infinite despair which fills our nothingness with the fullness of appeal.⁵² The concept of the absurd state cannot be refuted, though it may be rejected, and on a logical basis, too. It is absurd that everything should be absurd. Or, in Pascalian terminology, it is incomprehensible that everything should be incomprehensible. Philosophic Absurdism admits of a sort of logical blackmail. From the way in which it sometimes conducts the argument, it seems that reason or being can be sought in the world only by a sort of cowardly act or by an act of philosophical infantilism, and that any particular philosophical attitude can only be maintained when it becomes untenable.

Let us cut these pronouncements short. It requires no more courage to deny everything than it does to deny only some things. According again to Pascal, the most difficult thing is to deny when occasion arises and to make constructive assertions when occasion arises. Enthusiasm does the rest—at great speed, no doubt; but truth is not estimated in terms of speed. "Man is so constructed that, by dint of telling him he is a fool, you can make him believe it, and, by dint of his repeating it to himself, you, yourself come to believe him, too."⁵³ There is so much uncertainty and despair in the world that Existential faith (which, for some people, quite simply means *The Faith*) is not a reassuring thing, but a pure gamble. Yet, it is only through this faith that despair has any

⁵⁰ *Ou bien . . . Ou bien . . .* Ed. Gallimard, p. 502.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 504.

⁵³ *Pensées*, p. 502.

meaning, and, in fact, that it is despair at all. Otherwise, all we should get out of our misery would be a dry and neutral satisfaction, and much less would be heard of it.

Gabriel Marcel, likewise, without in any way minimizing the Christian tragic-appeal of existence, has been able to develop a complete ontology of *hope*, as opposed to the ontologies of despair. By amplifying Kierkegaard's philosophy, and by clarifying his train of thought, we can say that there is a closed form of despair and an open form of despair. The first type is based on a rejection and contains an egocentric twist, an intensification of the ego, an "I-ego," emitted from the demand-possessiveness axis. It arises from a fundamental undetachability in which man can receive no revelation of existence, because, in this condition, he is *full of himself*. It matters little from then on that he is far from satisfied, and rushes into a state of optimism, or that, overwhelmed by the deceptiveness of existence, he slips into a state of despair. The attitude of vested-interests is the same in both cases. Each of these two types considers the world in front of it as an unclassifiable and valid possession. The optimist is the one who always *reckons* on the future; the pessimist is the one who no longer counts on anybody or on anything. But both *do count on something*. They dispose of things and of themselves, and they pass judgment on the game. Let us recall this word which has already been quoted: "the unclassifiable state is the haunt of despair." Anxiety, and fear of the future, which are somewhat more restrained feelings, are already diseases caused by possessiveness. Hope, on the other hand, is, basically, a loosening of the *I*, a rejection of the desire to dispose of the ego, and to calculate my potentialities; it is voluntary ontological distraction, a form of detachment. It is not a means of beatifying my desires, because the further it gets away from desire the more authentic it becomes, and the more it refuses to imagine the shape of the thing hoped for. It represents patience; that is to say, it represents renunciation of eagerness, and of indiscretion in the face of anything in the world which can arise quite independently of my potential action. It does not consider the world as classifiable, and, therefore, exhaustible; on the contrary, it considers it as something inexhaustible. It refuses to estimate the possibilities and, usually, to estimate the values at stake.

In this same sense, and on this same basis, it represents a standing-off-from, as far as the technical and functionalized world is concerned, and is based on the idea of assisting my ideas. It claims that techniques for estimating man's life are ultimately useless. It stands opposed to possessiveness and to undetachableness. It has faith in current experience

and gives it scope and opportunity. It represents the spirit of open adventure; it regards reality as beneficent, even if this reality must necessarily thwart my desires. We can forsake hope, just as we can forsake love. It is, therefore, certainly a virtue, and not a form of consolation or comfortableness. But it is more than a virtue: it is part of the ontological law of any being who can be described as transcendent within himself.⁵⁴ To accept or to forsake it is to agree or to refuse to be a man.

⁵⁴ Bergson seems to have been hampered sometimes by a certain restraint (which he derives from his professorial type of mind and from his scientific bent) against developing fully all the implications of his reflexion, especially those which cannot be supported on any direct scientific basis. It has been left to Péguy to express poetically the optimism implied in Bergson's works.

III

THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL CONVERSION

THERE is a close similarity between the preoccupation of Existentialists and Personalists. We find this common ground, not only in Gabriel Marcel,¹ but also in Berdyaev. "Existential Philosophy is a personal philosophy; the subject of enquiry is the human person."² The existent is presented in the terms of a being in collision with the inertia or impersonality of the thing. Existentialists are unanimous on this point. They have sounded the call to a revival of Personalism in contemporary thought.

That is to say, in general terms, Existentialism presents a picture of a kind of intensified Personalism. We have seen how vivid was this reaction to impersonalism among the Idealist and Materialist philosophers and how it inevitably leads to the danger of isolating the individual in the solitude of his impassioned quest. This danger is allied to a more general problem which we shall deal with later.

If there is no system of existence, and there are only individual existents faced with choices which cannot be reduced to any ethical generality, then the universe of the existent is in danger of being cracked beyond repair as the result of a general shattering of isolated individuals, and the individual himself is in danger of being cracked beyond repair, too, by the splintering effect of arbitrary and incommunicable decisions. Ultimately, an absolute discontinuity would make the world both quite unthinkable and quite untenable. This extremity has, perhaps, not been reached; there is no doubt that Existential thinkers have brushed up against it. It does not exactly mark the limits of Existentialism, but there is a great lateral risk, similar to the risk involved in the stupidity of total objectification, which lurks on the outskirts of material and social organization without being a fatal sequel to it.

Thus, Existentialism has been tempted more than once to deny the theory of species or of human nature. Kierkegaard used to say that the relationship of Man to God is higher and greater than his relationship

Être et Avoir, p. 11.

² *Cinq Méditations sur l'existence*, Ed. Montaigne, p.74.

to his species. He does not deny that the crowd—to-day, it would be called “the masses”—can have its value in its own way, but it is “the individual alone who reaches the goal,” as far as existence is concerned.³

For Kierkegaard, there is no morality of exception here, in the Nietzschean sense,⁴ since each man is called upon to become this lone being. Here, solitude appears, not as an end, but as a necessary means for the concentration of thought; in a crowd, the tension required for real existence cannot be attained. Alone, the individual can receive, understand and transmit truth—and, here, we must, as Kierkegaard does, write “the Individual” with a capital “I.” By this term, he did not mean the isolated and anarchical individual of the moment, the empirical individual, but he meant Man transfigured by his communion with God. “To dare to be an Individual,” in this religious sense, is the highest attribute of man, and the stress is laid, not on the isolation of the subject, but on the intensity of the communion—the “impassioned interest” he shares with God, and, through Him, with beings and things.⁵

Man is a complicated mixture; everything about him is ambiguous, and the tragic suffering of the existent prevents him from being confused with the shameless fellow who sets himself up above the generality by some whim of his own; the true Individual adds to such a form of superiority over the generality the qualities of purity of heart and inward transparency.⁶ Kierkegaard ends by formally declaring that “the demoniac is the individual who shuts himself up in himself,” because he identifies *eo ipso* with self-deception, whereas, “the good is manifestation.”⁷

It is not the individual who is the exception; he is the extraordinary.⁸ Yet this is, perhaps, badly expressed. Greatness is not based on singularity, and heroism consists neither in the exceptional nor in the extraordinary—the hero can be that very family man whom nobody ever notices.⁹ The

³ Here we are reminded of *I Corinthians, IX, 24*.

⁴ Nietzsche's opinion about the individual follows a sinuous curve. *Zarathustra* formally states that “a woman is never pregnant except with her own child” (Fourth Part, para. II). But *Desire for Power* puts the question as to whether the individual is not just a somewhat more highly developed form of error than species, the imaginary unity arising from a clash of many forces. (Ed. Gallimard, para. 162). Nevertheless, it finally asserts that “goals elude us and goals can only be individuals.” (Book III, para. 402). Yet, we must guard against stating a general principle that many men can be persons. Many men exhibit several forms of personality, but the majority of men have no personality at all. (Book III, 728). This is why Nietzsche finally no longer believes in anything but the exceptional being, the one who contains within himself humanity for others. (Book IV, 348).

⁵ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 97.

⁶ *Christ*, Ed. Tisseau, p. 191.

⁷ *Concept d'Angoisse*, p. 187.

⁸ *Christ*, p. 191.

⁹ *Ou bien . . . Ou bien*, p. 571.

Knighthly Warrior for the Faith can often present, from the outside, a striking resemblance to what faith most despises, the bourgeois mind. Here, again, we catch Kierkegaard pulling himself up short on the edge of his own declivity. He then goes on to write in his *Journal*: "The great point is to preserve in an individual life the greatest possible number of generally-accepted human qualities."

Jaspers, as we shall see, was no less tempted to isolate the individual in his spiritual conduct, though, in so doing, he has described one essential aspect of existence, and denounced the misconception at the moment it was arising. He distinguishes the *ipse*-ness, which represents oneness with the world, from *subjectivity*, which means shutting oneself up in oneself. The latter state, wherever it develops to excess, leads dialectically to a resentment against the limits of the self, with suicide at the extreme limit. Anguish also expresses this self-concern abnormally extended. But shutting oneself up in oneself is definitely evil, and one must avoid evil by means of the factor of communication; this represents the will to know and the will to reveal oneself.

Thus, the spiritual life of "me"—the "subjective-self"—is the ground for an incessant dialectic whose tension is at once irresolvable and creative. On the one side, it represents pursuit of unity, and, since no one man can experience all the forms of unity, I must make narrowly-limited choice and plunge passionately in some direction towards existence, since that is the only way to meet existence. This selectiveness necessitates an inevitable limitation and isolation, but, in order to be a man, I must have the will to go beyond them.

We find this urge to inwardization, coupled with this watchfulness against egocentricity, in every type of Existentialism. It is, according to Heidegger, a characteristic of the human being to be opposed to what is fencing him in, or shutting him up in a box—"encapsuled," as Gabriel Marcel exclaimed. Gabriel Marcel directed a singularly bitter criticism against the idea of *autonomy*.¹⁰ It presupposes a rigorously circumscribed subjective-self which I govern, or within which I legislate—which merely means an abstract form of governing. Yet, in contradistinction to this presupposition, "I don't belong to myself." The affinity of me for myself is not a possessive affinity. Only the undetachable man clings to possessiveness. To commit suicide is obviously to dispose of oneself,¹¹ and it may be said that, in this sense, there is a complete difference between the suicide and the martyr.¹² The self of undisposability

¹⁰ *Être et Avoir*, p. 188 *et seq.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20 *et seq.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 214.

is a thickening, a sclerosis, a sort of deceptive expression, not of *my body*, which is an aspect of my existence, but of *this* body, which the generality calls mine, treated as an object, as a thing which "I possess."

No doubt, the conquest of personal life demands a permanent application to meditation, but Gabriel Marcel very strongly favours the notion of inward life.¹³ Inwardness calls for a constant dialectical component of outwardness. To live intensely is to be *exposed*, in the double sense in which the words indicate *detachability* from outward influences as well as the characteristic *daring* of the person; it represents courage to *expose oneself*. To live personally is to assume an ever-changing situation and responsibilities and to reach out ceaselessly beyond the situation which has been attained.

To exist, therefore, is to take a totally different direction from that in which the jealous movement of desire is carrying me off, and it is quite another thing from merely living my life, that is. "There is one thing which is called 'to live' and another thing which is called 'to exist,' and I have chosen 'to exist'."¹⁴ The term, "my being" must never be confused with the term, "my life"; I am anterior to my life and I am not exhausted by it; I am in a state beyond it. The state of becoming a "person" involves a movement to extend beyond it, both as regards what it is and what it is not. "Its motto is not *sum*, but *sursum*." *Intimacy* is, like sincerity, a dialectical notion. In one sense, spirituality is a total movement towards an *intimus intimo meo*, just as it also is a total movement towards an outwardness and a beyond of myself. Now, in the course of this movement, meditation seems to stick to a sort of adhesion of myself to myself; in the course of its movement, it can develop a sort of suffocation of me by me, and herein lies the danger in a life which is too attentive to itself.

A good soldier, or a good member of a team, is a man whose skill and vigilance have been developed to the utmost. Yet, although he has been so perfected, he is, at the same time, accustomed to total disregard of self when in battle or on the playing-field. It is just the same with personal life, and, in order to keep the state of our inward intimacy and our relations with our neighbour both healthy, we must also know how to keep our distance.¹⁵ As Nietzsche says, we must not be afraid of frequently disinfecting our love for our neighbour with love of the background.

¹³ *Du refus*, p. 113 et seq; *Homo Viator*, p. 22 et seq.

¹⁴ *Être et Avoir*, p. 162.

¹⁵ G. Marcel stresses the importance of distance even in the works of a poet so much attached to the idea of contact as Rilke (*Homo Viator*, p. 303).

Personal life is not created completely shaped to fit life. Every individual must take up the conquest for himself. Therein lies the very essence of lasting enjoyment. Every type of Existentialism develops a dialectic of conversion. Each type describes several ways of life echeloned between the poles of existence lost and existence regained. A dissolvent force, so intimately mingled with existence as to be sometimes indistinguishable from it, sweeps us along untiringly towards the loss of existence while another untiringly summons us to reconciliation with ourselves.

LOST EXISTENCE

ALL the descriptions of lost existence amplify the Pascalian idea of diversion, which it would not be hard to find in earlier philosophies. Kierkegaard, who had felt, from an artistic point of view, the seductions of diversion, describes it as representing, above all, the fervent search for "the interesting side" of life. It represents the *æsthetic plane*, the elementary plane of the dialectic of the existent. Just as for Pascal, it is not the haunt of evil but of indifference.¹⁶ Whoever halts there has postponed his decision—note the fundamental choice involved, the choice of the meaning to be attached to life: personal life, perhaps, in the sense that he personally enjoys the æsthetic side of his life and æsthetically enjoys his personality,¹⁷ but not in any deeper sense. He does not seek the authentic; he seeks the odd. For example, he leaves his beloved after one night of love prepared for months ahead, abandoning the reality of love at the moment he is beginning to throb with his real life, the life of fidelity. He is capable of doing everything, but he undertakes nothing. If necessary, he will be capable of talking about God better than a parson, yet he does not become a parson. Even at the climax of sensuality, his eroticism is a sophisticated "spiritual eroticism" rather than a real sensual passion.¹⁸

Because it scatters life to the four winds, all æsthetic conception of life represents despair, conscious or otherwise. In contradistinction to the first impression it creates, it expresses a sort of vital impotence which is indicated by inability to find a way and to make a choice. Its essence thus being indifference, and not perversity, the seducer-seduced must be induced to abandon at all costs this indifference to making a choice. Such was the attitude of Pascal towards the libertine, who represents what Kierkegaard meant by the term "seducer." It is the attitude which, in so far as it resembles Existentialism, the Marxist

¹⁶ *Ou bien* . . . *Ou bien*, p. 474.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

critique is opposed to—only, of course, the Marxist critique is unaware that Existentialism has always denounced the vanity of it.

Heidegger's attitude is more objective than Kierkegaard's, and, moreover, his picture of the unauthentic life is less that of an artist and more that of a metaphysician, moralist and sociologist. The existent is continually faced, not *with*, but right in the midst of the possibility of choosing between two ways of life, the *authentic life* and the *unauthentic life* which, in spite of certain shades of meaning, may, in practice, be confused with *dailiness*. Heidegger definitely refrains from giving these words a moral value, but it must be pointed out that his usage of them oscillates from the descriptive to the normative register. In human existence, (and not only mixed in it) there is an incoercible tendency to interpret it according to the nature of the objects with which it is concerned; it is a tendency to be absorbed by the world into which it plunges, and to let oneself be swallowed up by it. It is a kind of Original Fall whose momentum drags us ever downwards.

The man of unauthentic existence looks out on the world of the *impersonal-they*.¹⁹ His is a half-banal cult, a levelling of the new, the exceptional, the personal and the secret. It represents a showy and irresponsible existence, and, in return for it, he enjoys spiritual quietude and vital assurance. Such estrangement from outward things is not, as it might seem, an expansion towards greater reality; on the contrary, it strangles at birth the desire for participation and comprehension. The existent, the oneself, disappears beneath the anonymous and irresponsible impersonal-theyself, but the impersonal-theyself must not be imagined as an odd or historically-conditioned decadence; it is the most constant state of human existence, and some people go right through life without ever getting beyond it. By dint of modelling himself on things, the unauthentic being finally comes to consider himself as a thing among things, and he expresses himself in the form of daily gossiping as the result of which each exister is reduced to the distracted talk which is supposed to represent his personality. Communal existence leads back to communal gossiping, to the way of life characteristic of an uprooted existence cut off from all real harmony between it and the world of men. There is sometimes a measure of recovery, caused by a purely apparent vitality, by a flitting and superficial but quite futile curiosity. The tumult which is thus set up blocks any return to the oneself and conceals the presence of anguish.

¹⁹ "Impersonal-they"—the French "*on*," as in "*on dit*," equivalent to the English: "*They* say there might be an election next year," "*It* said on the wireless last night *you* ought to wrap old cloths round *your* water tank."—E.B.

A perpetual flight from personal responsibility is going on in this particular world, and this word "personal" throws some light on the ambiguity of an otherwise remarkable description. It is the description of a resignation, but, nevertheless, it portrays the tendency to unauthenticity as an almost incoercible force, which, in spite of ourselves, directs the greater part of our lives. From Heidegger to Sartre, there is this same fundamental uncertainty about the origins of freedom.

Sartre has merely had to slip fresh analyses into this scheme of things without changing its general outlines. And, now, it is the psychologist and the novelist who add their contributions to the description of the inward attitude of estrangement: *falseness*,²⁰ and the quasi-physical impression, *Nausea*, which it leaves in the mind of the dispossessed existent. The human being, continually projected in advance of himself, gains from it the power to be simultaneously both what he is and what he is not.

The woman who resists a suggestion, and who, nevertheless, "deep down in her" really wants to consent, or who soon will consent, has already immediately become, at the same time, if not exactly in the same movement, this very resistance itself. Moreover, her next, and already-existent surrender is implied. Nevertheless, she exhibits both these things in different ways, and, through unity of consciousness, she brings a sort of imperfect harmony to this thin dissonance.

Such, then, is falseness. It is a sort of "lying without any liar," a state in which "*I am made to lie*" rather than a state in which "I am lying." It represents something not altogether impersonal and not entirely affirmed and responsible, but a kind of strabism²¹ between the authentic and the unauthentic state.²²

This analysis is very closely connected with Marx's analysis of mystification and social estrangement, but it has a more general application. Considered as a form of blind-consciousness, falseness also immediately reminds us of Pascal's diversion and trick-play on the term, the "quite natural." The Dirty Beast, according to the description in *Nausea*, is the man who subsists, in his dormant consciousness, on this vital self-deception, or who, even in his lucid moments, is content

²⁰ The text has *mauvaise foi*, which in common French means the contrary of the English "fair play"—falseness, dishonesty. But here Mounier alludes to the specific Sartre-use of this term, notably enlarged from the common use.—E.B.

²¹ "Strabism"—strabismus. An affection of the eye muscles making it impossible for both eyes to focus on an object simultaneously—a squint, or cast.—E.B.

²² *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 90 et seq.

to dabble in his trickery without definitely deciding in favour of lucidity and liberty. Under cover of a new phraseology (which we find running all through Malraux's account of the triumph of sensibility of action over an artistic sensibility), we come back to the great process of sincerity, which inspired Gide's generation. It is through perfidy that the unauthentic principle is instilled in us; through morally-good-self-deception I bring myself to forget my original state whenever I put myself in that state of somnolence in which the Dirty Beast does not even realize he is a Dirty Beast, because he does not adopt the point of view by which his duplicity will be revealed to him.

Flabbiness is not the only thing which can cause us to fall into the unauthentic state. Jaspers, at the opposite extreme, and adopting the indifference standpoint, has shown the complex nature of the factor of *defiance*. Defiance is also an attitude of two-sided enlightenment—explicit negation and violent negation, and by the very violence of this constant negation it experiences the true life and pays it the homage of its fury. By itself, indifference is total negation.

For Gabriel Marcel, in the end, the authentic life is essentially, as we have already seen, undetachability and possessiveness.

EXISTENCE REGAINED

WE have spoken of "uprooting," and of "conversion." For the genesis of consciousness there must be a liberating action, and, on the threshold of this action we must make a *choice*. If indifference really means spiritual death, then deciding the choice is the first effect of conversion. Kierkegaard, following Pascal's example, concentrates his whole dialectic on this crucial point. "It is not so much a question of deciding to choose between good and evil as of choosing to decide."²³ In this respect, it is like the baptism of the will, which initiates it into the ethical order. Nevertheless, although in the process of conversion we do choose to decide, we may still decide upon evil; in this case, however, conversion has had the chance, (which indifference hasn't had) of deciding upon good. Instead of living his life as the "seducer," the existent is, henceforward, going to exist his existence. "Æsthetics represents what man automatically is, while ethics represents what he becomes."²⁴

Here, then, is a new Existential *cogito*: "*Know thyself*" is replaced by, "*Choose for thyself*."²⁵

²³ *Ou bien . . . Ou bien*, p. 474.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 513.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 538.

The individual "knows" himself, in the Biblical sense, by being fecundated, and the candidate enters upon his conversion through the narrow doorway of repentance and truth—which represents a process of retrogression as well as a state of lamentation. Æsthetic sadness, which means nothing more nor less than being sick of living, and which, in the middle of its cries of despair, frequently bursts happily into song, must be swept away by ethical sadness; it must be purified by the resolve of man humiliated by the thought of his own sin. Nevertheless, here, as for Pascal, the move to a higher plane of life does not cancel out the values of the lower planes; the move to the ethical plane does not entail the exclusion of the æsthetic plane, though, strictly-speaking, the æsthetic plane becomes only relatively important. Æsthetic enjoyment of life always depended on external contribution, and man never deliberately based his life on it. It gives way to the factor of freedom by means of which man becomes what he is.

Nevertheless, the ethical state is still operated according to the plan of man in general. Æsthetic man was accidental man: ethical man is man-in-general whose life is still a compromise between generality and singularity. The move to the supreme plane, the religious plane, of the Individual involves the sweeping away of any suspension of the ethical plane. It begins with acceptance of the religious paradox which draws us away from acceptance of generality and its assurances through the force of the shock which it brings to us. It is the most difficult operation of all, because all our faculties which are developed by tranquillity, including the very highest ones, intelligence and faith, ally themselves against the leap which puts us in full communion with the Absolute. We have seen in what arid isolation this decision puts the Individual, but, at the very moment we are reaching the supreme goal of the whole dialectic, the powers of wisdom become shaky. Religious choice cannot be the object of verbal communication, but only of sermonizing; (Jaspers would call it "invocation," and Gabriel Marcel would call it "attestation.") By this factor, the Individual does communicate with the Individual, but his words can only be transmitted by being drowned in the Word of God. Even the gestures of the religious man poorly express the fundamental decision he has made, for this decision is a secret one which any expression of it is likely to betray. Kierkegaard extends this reserve, which for him is half-sacred, half-pathological, so far that he creates out of authenticity, not only the mask and the pseudonym, but also a sort of comedy of irreverence and immorality so designed that, under any circumstances, one mistakes the face of the religious man for

the grimacing incarnations which the religious man portrays in it. Perhaps it is here that one could find the philosophical roots of a certain literary elevation of sin conceived as a sort of seal of spiritual authenticity. Beyond this concept, there is nothing but Pharisaism.

In order that the existent may pass into the state of authentic existence imagined by Heidegger, he must realize the dispersive power of the impersonal-theyself and free himself from it. This conversion is not the result of a call of God, but is the response to a summons which the existent serves on the existent—the existent who is shrouded in the distress and nudity of his fundamental dereliction as contrasted with the existent who permeates the impersonal-theyself. At best, this conversion is not, in this case, a transfiguration or a redemption, because human nature is negative and cannot come out of its negativeness. As far as this aspect of Heidegger is concerned, we are quite clearly atheistically separated from Lutheranism.

For Luther, too, human nature, if not exactly nothingness in its essence, is nothingness in so far as power is concerned. It is overwhelmed with its burden of sin before God, and Grace can only give it a faith; but, from the cradle to the grave, faith never inwardly transforms human nature. Heidegger, like Luther, considers the human being to be so essentially a nucleus of nothingness that, as Luther says, it would require a veritable destruction of his being in order to make him capable of a transformation. The form of death imagined by Heidegger, however, has no to-morrow, and, according to him, faith is only a final trick by the unauthentic life to inspire us to recovery. Somewhat like the Lutheran "faith," the "conversion" imagined by Heidegger is nothing more than a form of efficient lucidity, a revelation of the intrinsic sinfulness of existence which has been freed from the impersonal-they at the same time as it is gripped by this sin. Looking squarely at his condition, the existent undertakes the *resolute decision*, the ever-precarious conquest and resummoning. We realize that it consists in viewing all things *sub specie mortis*.

For Sartre, the highest type of life appears, above all, to be a revival of freedom, and, in welcoming anything strange which happens to disconcert his world, the Dirty Beast can give himself the key to lucidity and thus to freedom.²⁶ The first step in Existentialism is to convey to every man the consciousness that he is entirely responsible for his

²⁶ In *Nausea*, it is, for example, the disquieting appearance of the stranger in a restaurant, the spectre of Nature devouring cities, the particular tongue which changes to a milliped inside one's mouth—the Kafka attitude to perfection.

existence, and that, in thus taking control of himself, he becomes master of and possessor of the whole world.²⁷ Such a type of freedom, however, is opposed to the Marcellian concept of detachability, because it is open to nothing and offered to nothing. It is a freedom *all for nothing*.

A Personalist attitude, as we thus see, is not defined solely according to its initial step, that violent movement by which it drags man from slumber or from anxiety concerning his lost life. It differs considerably according to the amount of reality with which he identifies the personal life. In Existentialist perspective, it is always fervent and mobile, and so revolves around nothingness. In other respects, it rises to a fulness.

The common feature of all these diverse tendencies is agreement about the predominance of the will to be free over the state of anxiety concerning organization.

²⁷ *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Ed. Nagel, p. 24.

IV

THE CONCEPT OF ATTACHMENT

IF, however, this freedom can only be obtained through reflexion, it is never a solitary freedom. For some people, it may originate in the impasse created by a despairing solitude. But, it would be wrong to interpret this particular Existentialist reaction as a necessary development. On the contrary, Existentialist philosophers represent a general reaction against modern Subjectivism. Existentialism substitutes a new picture for the old analogy of likening man, or the ego, to a nut embedded in the core of a fruit called the world. Instead of the simile of something fitted-in, it substitutes the metaphor of resurgence, or irruption (*Aufbruch*), or, in the terminology of Sartre, of explosion. Heidegger goes on to say that man is not placed in front of the world like a capsule, or a receptacle, which from time to time is to be filled with outpourings from the world. Man is a *being-on-the-earth*, always in a fixed position, and always subject to the impossibility of his taking any other view of the world than that provided by his particular situation in it. This view may considerably extend our perspective while continuing to keep it a restricted perspective. Actually, I am not just that globule of flesh and mind which at first sight I might appear to be, but, through the expansive power of my consciousness, I am those very mountains that I can see, or the whole of that country in whose life I share, or those far-off friends by whose efforts I do live. Yet, although I am thus hurled on all sides beyond the shabby confines of my body and of my individuality, I am this universe of space and time which I am, only in accordance with the theory that I cannot change; it is a theory which postulates for me, in my state of being, an irreducible partiality, a definitive limitation. If I were really to reject this point of view, and to evade this state of affairs, I should never rise above myself; my life would be wasted in vague ravings. Thus, the concept of attachment is not only a statement of fact but also a rule for wholesome living.

Here, the two branches of Existentialism come closer to each other than they do at any other point. Of course, here, we are only touching

on man's state and not upon his ultimate developments. Even in Kierkegaard, that Don Quixote of Existentialism, we recognize a second Cervantes who, while still not rejecting the eccentric promptings of the paradoxical life, eagerly inclines towards that form of being which is based on dailiness, provided it is not worn thin through indifference. As far as he is concerned, conversion to this exceptional type of life, to that super-life which constitutes authentic Existentialism, could not introduce any disturbing element into daily existence. It was the error of the Middle Ages, he thought, the error of novices, and the result of an insufficient amount of inward faith, to imagine the existent as indifferent to the finite world. One must be religious and yet at the same time go to Dyrhaven Park (the Danish Coney Island) as well!¹ Precisely in order to stress the absolute transcendence of inwardness, the protagonist of secret inwardness must lead the same sort of life as other people. Thus, as far as human affairs are concerned, his outlook, with its somewhat disdainful orthodoxy, reminds us of the sceptic's outlook. Previously, Pascal had advised his readers to "follow custom," while, at the same time, retaining their own ideas at the back of their minds. Instead of: "Follow custom," however, another man was destined to call upon his followers to "Revolt!" on the basis of other conceptions. But the attitude remains the same. These ideological evasions and mystifications which Marxism fights against arise, less from stern conceptions of transcendence (which leave man to his own devices), than from the widespread incidence of intermediary systems which are neither things of this earth nor of heaven. Moreover, under pretext of connecting them up, we separate them from each other. Kierkegaard warned Christianity against the temptation to set up equivocal Christian communities as the result of which the Christian Absolute is debased through developments based on compromise. As far as these are concerned, he was not unmindful of the extent to which the influences of earth and flesh can bind a being, circumscribed by choice, to the world. The mystic makes a choice, but only by renouncing the world. Now, "the true concrete choice is that by which, at the very moment when I choose to renounce the world, I choose also to return to the world."² I make my choice as "a predetermined product in a predetermined environment," and, because in so doing I take my whole being into account, I assume responsibility for it.

We notice how complex the connexion between a Transcendentalist

¹ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 330.

² *Ou bien . . . Ou bien*, p. 531 *et seq.*

attitude and problems of action can be. There can be no doubt that, from one aspect, it attracts the mind to adopt an attitude of Relativism bordering on Scepticism, and how it encourages an attitude favourable to non-intervention. Nevertheless, at the same time, it provides man with a sort of quietus as far as temporal affairs are concerned, and clears away the moralist confusion which, to such a large extent, subsists on sociological reflexions. Kierkegaard flounders between these two claims; we should not try to find the synthesis set down in his works or exhibited in his actual way of life. This would certainly show that we had a very poor understanding of that twisted being whose nature exhibited an equal degree of foolishness and wisdom. Yet, his foolishness always amounts almost to a logical harmony—something like a dissonance which continues to suggest its real nature without ever actually expressing it. And, yet again, it would be a mistake to assume that concern about spiritual stability is absent from his thinking. It is expressed, in a manner that is at once disjointed and connected—as if he seemed to think that the Christian must, in order to prevent himself from going mad, seek wisdom with all his heart and soul, and yet must stop short before beginning the search, in case he should sink under the weight of wisdom when he has found it.

It is difficult to find a more remarkable passage about Christian attachment—one of the most remarkable passages, moreover, in all Christian literature—than the chapter in *The Alternative* which he wrote in praise of marriage: he proposes two conceptions about marriage; the first emphasizes love to the exclusion of marriage, while the other emphasizes marriage to the exclusion of love. Is it, therefore, the fundamental purpose of marriage to destroy love? Or is it not rather that conjugal love represents first-love itself enriched by a state which, far from cancelling it out, actually perfects it? Middle-class marriages often seem unconsciously to pave the way for the divorce of marriage from love. When sweethearts get into a state of sustained coquetry, they put themselves outside reality and into “that soft and doughy bun” which represents the dream of the inconsistent infinity of their potentialities.

This state of first-love *is*, without the assistance of any other factor, and at the time in question. It is like an *an sich*, like an in-oneself which is perpetually void of any real content. It is “created by ephemeral magic”; is wedded to a sort of miraculous infecundity; it is like something infinite which “has no possibility of advancement”; it is powerless to make its infinity finite, or to display it within the real eternity of

duration, instead of isolating it within the illusory eternity of the moment. This miraculous eternity of first-love is, in fact, real. But it is not absorbed into the general state of marriage. In the married state, it rises to a higher concentricity—from the æsthetic sphere to the ethical and religious sphere. The joys of first-love are embedded in a state of active *repetition*; they represent a continually-renewed rebounding of primitive sweetness. Youthful amazement is handed on by means of the continual amazement arising from the life of decision. The conquest of love yields to the incessant conquest created by the inwardization of the relationship between the two partners who are in love, and this tends to be objectivated into habit. First-love now becomes part of a tale; its infinity is provided with finiteness; its eternity assumes the aspect of temporality. It is an obligatory transformation: *in order to maintain our inwardness we must abandon pure inwardness*. The mistake made by first-love was the belief that it could only be achieved by a retreat from the world. But, “Art is surpassed by a multiplicity of other factors, while at the same time maintaining its mysterious side.” We are afraid that love will cease the moment the mystery of it is dispelled: on the contrary, love begins when mystery is dispelled. The notion of any mystery attaching to the present state is a piece of sheer childishness. External tribulations are still spoken of as if they necessarily suppressed the poetry of marriage, when, in fact, they only have to be inwardized and transformed. At this stage, those who fear the results of continuity and habit are people of a purely acquisitive turn of mind, and are incapable of understanding what is meant by “possessing” something. Now, since we are speaking about æsthetics, we should remember that real art lies in possession, not in acquisitive-conquest. It lies, not in possessing the particular, but in possessing the particular within the general, and in consecrating it by this form of preferment. This is why the wisdom of the ordinary man-in-the-street, as opposed to the restricted wisdom of snobs, requires the celebration of an “Iron Wedding” before a Silver Wedding Anniversary and a Silver Wedding Anniversary before a Golden Wedding Anniversary. Thus, popular psychology obviously considers marriage to be a continuous process of enrichment.

Here, then, are the two poles between which Kierkegaard’s concept of attachment is stretched. It is thus seen to be a dialectical attitude, in which two movements, “attachment” and “detachment”, inwardly encourage each other. Pristine love develops into family-life, but subject to the “heavy family unity” which produces nausea and dulls the mind. Again, the art of marriage lies in maintaining the flow of this

hidden life within the family circle, whose ties, under the influence of the homeliness of sentimental bonds, expand into the invisible state. Real inferiority considerably enlarges the soul, because *it is associated, in an absolute manner, with an absolute end which is contained within relative ends.*

There you have the key—in the shape of a formula: Attachment is always necessary; it is always a private doorway. It oscillates between ethical repetition and religious mysticism; between time, which sustains it, and eternity, which inspires it. It is in this world, without ever quite being of this world.

It will be observed that Existential attachment is quite the reverse of a sort of massive and calm solidity—which is what it is frequently thought to be nowadays. It short-circuits disquietude and action—and nobody thinks this perverse. Moreover, in so far as I am either a detached or a partisan spectator, I am surrounded by advantageous certitudes, whether or not those certitudes represent the vanity of all things. In so far as I am partisan, I am led into obscurity and into speculation.

Jaspers' analysis of *being-in-a-situation* emphasizes the liaison between our highest spiritual life and the encumbrances of this spiritual darkness and of the world, with which we weigh down our attachment. There are the factors of place, time, family, environment and character—I am born into a place in the world, a place peculiar to me. I did not choose my ground to fight upon—I don't even clearly understand the meaning of the struggle, yet, this place is mine; it is my position. The world into which I am thrust by taking up my position is not the world, but *my world*; it is, at one and the same time, a world that can be perceived and a world that can be operated. For scholars, of course, there is an objective world, but that sort of world is not the world of experience. It is impossible for the existent to put himself seemingly outside the world in order to experience it in its totalness, as if it were an external concept of experience. What I mistake for the objective world is only a compromise between different views of the world (the scientific view being one of these) and my own particular view. The world that I conceive is always a party to my point of view. I discover it by finding my way about in it. Whatever is true of the world as a whole is also true of my particular position in it, because, for me, that represents the world. I am not the observer of it; it is not a concurrence of objective circumstances which I could express in clearly set out schemes. *I am in my place in the world before I begin to elucidate it, and to elucidate myself*

as well as it, and before I begin to elucidate the world in which we find ourselves. Nor is this view a subjective one, either. It is always lurking on the outskirts of the consciousness which I obtain from it; it drags me ahead of myself and my apparent-reality; it is contrary to the nature of an idea, in that it is opaque, and it is contrary to the nature of a dream, in that it is irrevocable. It weighs upon me like a sort of Determinism (and here we meet the Heideggerian notion of "derection.") It confines me to a narrow and encompassed path along which I move in search of being. And yet, it is mine only if I adopt it along with my freedom.

Because it ceaselessly unravels itself as a consequence of the effects of my acts, it becomes a choice which is always being put for my decision. My only chance of reaching existence is through its narrow doorway—narrowness being a condition of depth. Thus, the condition in which I find myself is like a rare sort of knot which can never be undone even by lucid thinking, for this knot binds freedom to necessity, the potential to the real, time to eternity, and transcendence to immanence by a state of mysticism which we are not competent to unveil, but which, nevertheless, is the source of life. The most obscure and yet the most fundamental situations are those borderline situations, like death, fighting, suffering and sin, which, at the extreme point of existence, no longer even unify me, as current situations do, but which seem, in some sort of way, to hang over me and to restrict my understanding of being by a black cloud through which man's gaze does not penetrate.

Thus, I realize my situation as the result of influences which are more lumped together than the influences of perception or of ideas. Heidegger would claim that my particular state in the world is that of *preoccupation*. An isolated state of being, a Robinson Crusoe state of being, would be a feeble and distraught state of being. The human being is fundamentally *anxious-minded*. But he is ceaselessly preoccupied about the world; one may almost say that he preoccupies it. There can no more be a world without a subject than there can be a subject without a world. This is what modern Physics is forced to concede by its reintroduction of observation into the Newtonian universe. It is man who gives the world its meaning as the world; it is man who welds it to himself. Thus, Heidegger refuses to put the problem of the exterior world, which he finds absurd and shameful, as well as a survival of a speculative turn of mind. Man and the world are presented contemporaneously, and are related to each other.

One of the principal characteristics of the world is duration. Man's

being is a historical fact, but, there can be no kind of history, not even Natural History, unless it is associated with a human existence. And, there can be no human existence except that associated with history. Unauthentic existence is not a process of continuous unfolding; it stagnates into a series of solidified present-tenses, opaque and successive, which can never constitute an existence. Determined existence, on the other hand, grasps the fundamental situation and the heritages of its past in the world; it even bases the energy of its actions on the limitations they provide. It represents individual history, and, by the same token, it is a part of general history. Is there no friction between the two concepts? Whoever advocates individual history is automatically favouring the introduction of a form of freedom; whoever advocates the History of the World is automatically confronting the individual with a definite necessity. Kierkegaard had thoroughly appreciated the difficulty involved here. In his day, history had already enabled Hegel to consecrate the spoils acquired by a Power-State, and to discourage all thinking which contested the morality of the consecration. In the same way, Kierkegaard, too, opposes Existence to History—but, when you start arguing on the basis of what capital letters signify, well, there is scarcely any more to say on the subject!

History contains the elements of inertia and creativeness. The second Existentialist generation takes a less negative attitude towards Hegel—Jaspers even goes so far as to defend the notion of the initiating-virtue of penetrating into the works of all forms of collective machinery and the preoccupations created by it. Although they do not throw sufficient light on this knotty problem, Heidegger and Sartre stress the fact that the limitations imposed by freedom are, in fact, the very pillars of freedom. I can work out my plan of life only with the support of these limitations. There is, in this world, and within my body, a sort of antagonism towards my freedom, a tendency “to gum it down.” Moreover, my method of being in the world must be more precisely determined. “To be in the world, means to frequent the world, not to be clogged down by it.”³ It means to embed the mobility of the “for-oneself,” of the potential being, in the world. I frequent the world from one end to the other and the world haunts the innermost recesses of my personality. But the pressures exerted by the world are nothing but inducements held out to me, and it may be claimed that the questions it puts to me depend on the very answers I give to them.

On this occasion, the branches of the Tree of Existentialism seem

³ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 302.

to run with the same sap and to bear the same fruit. Yet, even here, we discern a cleavage between the two tendencies, and, moreover, it must be noted that this cleavage is responsible for the breach between the Atheistic and the Christian forms of Existentialism which is never healed, but which sometimes worms its way into both.

An unresolvable ambivalence affects the notions of "objectivity" and "subjectivity." Objectivity is concerned with the reasonable feeling that man, in order to be, must cast himself out of himself and aim at the testing of things and at an ultimate goal; it also represents mortal objectification into pure outwardness. Subjectivity is concerned with exploration of the human existent, and with what differentiates him from the world of objects; it is also interested in the temptation to dream and in psychological involution.

All these misunderstandings between Existentialists (or Personalists) and Materialists turn on these two ambivalent factors. They may be expressed, but they can never be inwardly resolved, because it is in the nature of outward action to glide imperceptibly towards objective death, and in the nature of inwardization to steal imperceptibly towards subjective dissolution, from the moment when a violent effort to diminish these two drifts (which actually give rise to Personalism) relaxes its pressure. Moreover, it will always be possible, even under conditions of greater stability, to pick up the tracks of either deviation again.

When Marxists discuss Existentialism, they generally argue as if it were only a question of subjectivity, and of a sort of subjectivity which implies an automatic renunciation of the objective world. This is to forget that, in this connexion, the notion of attachment implies in itself an importance equal to the notion of inwardization. There is, nevertheless, an element of truth in what they claim—not in the sense that Existentialism represents a progression, but in the sense that it is gradually introduced, like a slow poison, into the blood, and introduces a sort of ontological mistrust, in so far as outwardness is concerned.

In a complete philosophy of Existentialism, such as the one we are trying to re-establish here, this mistrust is balanced by an equal and exactly similar mistrust of closed-subjectivism—the caricature of inwardization. But the historical conditions under which a doctrine is evolved must not be forgotten. Existentialism has established itself face to face with a world in which scientific materialism tends to deny (again, because of a reaction) the reality of subjectivism. In a world which has become a world with bewildering speed, the first step for Existentialism is to rescue the existent from the disintegrating effects

of publicity, from the inertia of things, and from docile socialness, in order to start him off on the search for human existence. In order to set man up again on his axis, it wrenches his roots—just as a dislocated joint is twisted in order to get it back in place. An operation involving such violence cannot be performed without the risk of wrong movements being made. History teaches us that any disturbance of equilibrium always begins with an outburst of counter-violence.

Moreover, not all Existentialists have found the means of expressing coherently their fundamental mistrusts, such as mistrust of dissolution into mere things, and mistrust of escapism through dreaming—and those who have found it have not always done so invariably. The apex of the Bergsonian cone represents too serene a picture of a schoolmaster at the blackboard; it does not express the dramatic nature of an equilibrium whose purpose is to belong to man, who is in a state of perpetual disequilibrium.

There is thus evident sometimes in Existentialism a note of disparagement of the world considered in its relation to the elevated status of the subject. In *Naturalism and Empiriocriticism*, Lenin stated his approval of a wholesome reaction against this form of disparagement—in this book he also made an attack, with which we are not concerned here, on Idealism. This form of disparagement is, moreover, a particularly sore point with Marxist criticism, which recently accused Sartre of supporting the notion.⁴ He was accused of regarding the objective universe as nothing but “a universe of instruments and squalid obstacles, chained together and supported, one upon another, by a fantastic concern to help each other, but marked with the stigmata which are so terrifying to the gaze of Idealists of the so-called ‘Pure-outwardness School’;” and, as far as man is concerned, of regarding the objective universe as “a means of creating failure, as something intangible, basically indifferent, and a perpetual potentiality—in other words, the exact opposite of what it is for Marxist Materialism.”

Here, the original type of Existentialist thinking is a little dated: a man like Kierkegaard was thinking of that “Golden Age” when (at least in so far as those who enjoy the benefits of civilization are concerned) socially-organized life, industrial and urbanized life, that is, had adequately suppressed man’s primitive fears, but had not yet noticeably developed its own dangerous tendencies. This “Golden Age” permitted conditions for intellectual thinking which were less permanent than is often imagined. It was the optimum era for man to be able to develop

⁴ *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*—appendix, Naville’s dissent, p. 123—125.

his meditation in the margin of the world, and to be able to forget, and, to some extent, to despise, the world of objects. He had the advantage over man of the Middle Ages, who was harassed by Nature-in-the-Rough, and over present-day man, who is harassed by the commercialization of the world. This happy state of tranquillity is no more, and, so definitely is it no more, that it might never have existed. Consequently, there is a fresh task for Existentialism. To-day, it has not only the job of upholding subjectivity, in opposition to an objective world—or side by side with it—but there is also the task, *in the brave new technical world, of preserving the salvation of inwardness, and of doing this with the help of the technical world.* Existentialism must do this by means of and because of the ambivalences we have referred to, which are also both for and against the brave new world, in the same way as Existentialism itself must do its job both with and without the help of deep reflective thinking.

Here, the insufficiency of any form of pure Materialism (provided, nevertheless, that this type of being postulated by Rationalism has supporters anywhere), when it argues in its worldly way, is exemplified by its misunderstanding of the human aspect of the world. The object is the object *for* man. Although Husserl, for example, thinks there can be, there cannot be any impartial observer of the world any more than there can be, so to speak, any impartial object in the world. Every object (the word is self-explanatory) is an object—something cast *in front of*—presented before man; the world is a world—organized, unified and productive—only when it is presented before man (and, for some people, when it stands before God, and continuously before conscience for its use). It falls to the lot of Existentialism to emphasize too strongly, in this *being-for* state, the *for* at the expense of the *being*. It is what, in spite of everything else, Heidegger's attitude seems most concerned with. The world around us is conditioned more by our preoccupations than by the objective relations between things. For him, things are not so much things as instruments, which do not regard being as being-in-oneself but as being-under-the-thumb-of-man, as a state of being which depends ontologically on our activity. If, in any other way, man is preoccupied with things before he is concerned to reflect about himself and to pivot himself towards the centre of himself, then the primitive connexion between consciousness and action seems like a primitive type of mentality, in the sense that the word has taken on in contemporary phraseology. So long as he remains absorbed in action and preoccupation, the ultimate meaning of the word can only escape him, and he is threatened with

dissolution into things. It seems that there is an initial stage in which things are for man and man is for things, and that it leads inevitably, unless there is a conversion to authenticity, to a fatal objectification. It seems, moreover, that, at a second stage, the authenticity of existence is acquired only at the expense of things, and, in this case, one can no longer see what worthwhile degree of existence things provide for liberated man. In brief, it would seem that at the present time, Existentialist "attachment" is becoming, as Naville claims in the book we have quoted from, in actual practice a term of reproach, and is making no attempt to refute the allegation. It is becoming an empty kind of attachment out of all real touch with the world.

But this threat—for it concerns a distorting power, rather than an attitude of mind, propounded by Heidegger and Sartre, and the same applies to Kierkegaard—is like a sort of Existentialist children's disease. It follows in the wake of the very world it struggles against but from which, nevertheless, it is derived. It must be eliminated, in so far as the attainment of consciousness *in the face of* present-day opposition allows it to indulge in preoccupation concerning salvation *within* the world. Here, we must approximate to the Marxist problematic of the most orthodox form of thinking. Although their thinking has often taken the form of crude objectivism, medieval philosophy and contemporary Marxism are the two types of philosophy which undoubtedly have best demonstrated the irreducible solidity of the world of things—what might be called its true subjectivity, and which it maintains towards autonomy in opposition to human imperialism. Here, an exploratory route is opened up for developments which might result in attitudes which are still opposed to each other being better able to discern points on which they are opposed, as well as hitherto unsuspected grounds of common agreement.

Marx's Marxism was much more a form of Humanism than a form of Naturalism. Contemporary Existentialism shows that it is concerned to integrate objective existence. The most active form of contemporary thinking is finding its way along a number of roads which ultimately connect up. No doubt, it will be the task of the coming years to reconcile the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Marx.

THE CONCEPT OF OTHER-PERSON-NESS

THE problem of "other-person-ness" is one of the great conquests of Existentialism. Classical philosophy used to leave it strangely alone. If you enumerate the major problems dealt with by Classical philosophy, you have knowledge, the outside world, myself, the soul and the body, the mind, God, and the future life—the problem created by association with other people never assumes in Classical philosophy the same importance as the other problems. At one stroke, Existentialism has raised it to its central position.

It will, of course, be pointed out that this had already been done by the various forms of Sociology and Collectivism which filled the nineteenth century. Naturally, the part they played was by no means small, but their attention was concentrated upon social organization and not upon the nature of the connexion between one man's existence and the next man's. They were based on the plan of objective communication, that form which is operated by means of accepted phraseology, institutions and technical direction. Now, the Existentialist critique has a direct bearing on the danger of the factor of estrangement, which lies in wait for every existent who conducts his relations with men solely on the plan-of-organization basis. That was the first stage for Existentialism. It is not only a critical progress. ✕As the result of the simultaneous experience of the "too close" and of the stranger who makes a non-transformed contact with us, a form of nausea develops against contact with other people; it is similar to the nausea which is created by contact with things—it was the sort of nausea which Nietzsche felt throttling him: "All fellowship engenders generality"¹. Thus, to reserve oneself and to preserve oneself becomes a rule of life. "We do not so much prize our knowledge as communicate it to others."² Here, it is not disgust with the other-person, but disgust at his proximity despite the illusion of his absence. The force and fervour of the relationship

¹ *Par delà le bien et le mal*, aph. 160.

² *Ibid.*, p. 160. *Crépuscule des idoles* . ., Flâneries, 16.

which, as far as the Existentialist point of view is concerned, links the individual with his emotion—the passion for the Absolute, the passion for despair—and makes him feel even more intensely the Existential impotence of the objective relationship. We have noted in Kierkegaard's works this temptation to enter into the secret state, and seen the state of separation develop and then break down under the effects of a deeper inspiration. If direct communication is excluded as a means of communication suitable for existents, it is because it is an outward expression of what is established inwardly; it does not flow from the heart of one existent into the heart of another existent, and does not bear the stamp of communicated being. Moreover this state of affairs could still be possible even if there were no such thing as inwardness. Is it not the aim of the technical world wherever possible to replace man's incertitude by the precision of the machine? Between existent and existent there can only be indirect communication by means of signs, which summon others, and by means of enigmas, which stimulate attention, and by means of examples, which impel others to act.³ To tell the truth, Kierkegaard was too much of an æstete, and too much wrapped up in one side of himself to avoid being suspect, in this connexion, of bringing a peculiar state of mind into his reflexions about the straight and narrow path of existence. The problem of expression and the limitations to it interested him much more than the problem of communication. He would never speak about the latter problem, except in the way some theologians allude to woman-kind—by pointing out its dangerous side. We do not find in Kierkegaard the same passionate concern about the other-person which torments a man like Jaspers or Scheler. We have drawn attention to the emphasis which, in "*Either . . . Or*," is laid on conjugal living-together. But this book was his first, and this emphasis becomes rarer and rarer in his later works.

Nevertheless, if Christian Existentialism can discover gulfs of solitude and incomprehension between existents, then there does at least remain, in a Christian universe, the chance of a reconciliation, and, from the present-time onwards, some chance of the survival of the fundamental brotherhood of man.

As far as the Atheistic branch of Existentialism is concerned, even when it has tried to pick up some link between individual existences, it has been expecting some form of antagonism or slavery. It is thus to be radically distinguished from the "classical" Atheism of the

³ *Post-Scriptum* 160 et seq., 173 et seq., 185 et seq.; *Ecole du Christianisme*, 158 et seq.; *Christ*, 86.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and from the social optimism which characterized classical Atheism.

Heidegger ably argues that the *sein*, that is, being, represents *mitsein*, that is, *with-being*. But, in this *mitsein*, Sartre himself discerns nothing more than the "herd-feeling" which can inspire a lot of galley-slaves, despite the fact that none of them has any direct relationship with the others. On the contrary, there is in human existence an incoercible tendency to be agglomerated into the doughy non-existence of the world of the Impersonal-They, and this tendency is thus characterized by its insistence on the fundamental servitude of the existent in so far as the other-person is concerned. The existent does not belong to any particular person, but, even when he does free himself from one person, he merely falls into the servitude of another-person, and, above all, of other-persons. My existence is unalterably heteronomous. A form of servitude, which is much more degrading than the servitude I endure under my masters, insures that I share in their degradation without sharing in their triumphs—it is a form of servitude to human chaos, an amorphous and intolerable form of servitude. Authentic existence can only be obtained at the price of total dereliction. At the present time, there is a good deal of talk about "a despairing human society." Actually, there is nothing in Heidegger's works to suggest such a thing.

It is left to Sartre fully to reveal the evil of communication. We shall dwell on this at greater length, because, in his analysis, Sartre gives us the key to the problem. Let us recall the applications of his thesis: It will be convenient at the start actually to show us another-person from the point of view of his reality as another-person. Another-person is not that body which is there, the one which is in front of me, an object amongst objects; this body is *one particular* body, and, therefore, separated from all other relationship; it is not the body of *another-person*; it cannot confront me with another-person. As far as I am concerned, another-person is no longer a representation of another-person; he is a subtilized object, although still an object. In both cases, I try in an attitude of inwardness towards him, that is, precisely to say, in an attitude of being outside my fundamental "I—Thou" experience, to make contact with another-person.⁴ There is no common standard of comparison between an object and a subject. As far as human existence is concerned, the solipsism⁵ can be avoided only if there is a state of

⁴ On this experience, see Martin Buber—*Je et tu* (Ed. Montaigne).

⁵ "Solipsism"—A term in metaphysics for the doctrine that nothing exists outside the cognition of the self, and that the self can know nothing outside its own experience.—E.B.

accord between one being and another, and the final stage of this accord must be that between one subject and another. Therefore, there must be some sort of *Cogito* relating to another-person, and this, by casting me outside of myself, forces me to disembogue into some direct experience of another-person in concrete shape. As far as Sartre is concerned, this is simply a more detailed form of the Cartesian *Cogito*.⁶

Here, Sartre invites us to adopt a fundamental reversal of attitude. We always picture another-person as someone *that I can see*. Now, he is also someone *who can see me*. I see another-person-(object), but, at the same time, I am seen by another-person-(subject), *that is to say* (and let us note this connexion), another-person-(subject) sees me as an object. Now, I test this being-seen-as-an-object by observing him in such situations as shame, timidity, embarrassment, and, generally, in all the situations of the in-the-presence-of-another-person state, a state in which I imagine myself to have become an object, and a dependent object at that. Now, I cannot be an object from the point of view of another object, but only from the point of view of a subject—and, lo, you have the *Cogito* all worked out! Being-seen-by-another-person represents an irreducible situation which cannot be inferred, either from another-person-(object) or from my-being-(subject); it implies the presence of another-person-(subject). Fundamentally, therefore, another-person is someone *who is staring at me*.

The perceived-being state is not one of Sartre's discoveries; it has been a subject of deep interest for psychologists and psycho-analysts in recent years. To H. Wallon, we owe a remarkable treatise on the influence of another-person-staring on child behaviour.⁷ The tendency to get into the stared-at-state-of-being, and all its obscure guilty connexions, together with the tendency to desire to stare, the connexions between immodesty and prying, and between modesty and discreetness have been the subjects of numerous treatises. We have, in passing, stressed the importance, right from the earliest days of Existentialist philosophy, of the concepts of modesty and of the secret state. All that is new here is the ontological utilization of these investigations.

The stare of another-person thus converts me into an object within his field of vision. As far as I am concerned, another-person is a "system connected with experiences beyond my capacity to attain, and a system in which I figure as one object amongst a lot of others."⁸ He thus represents the complete negation of my experience as a subject. But,

⁶ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 308.

⁷ Cf. *Les Origines du caractère*, Boivin.

⁸ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 283.

he does not just make (“*fait*”) me into an object—I become a despoiled and dispossessed object as well. Here, slang terms become the language of philosophers: “I’m ‘spotted’ (“*vu*”)!” and “I’m ‘nabbed’ (“*fait*”)!” are synonymous, and they are synonymous with: “I’ve been robbed!”⁹

Now, what, as a matter of fact, does happen when another-person enters my field of being? He enters it with his stare, and with his point of view, and everything happens as if, at the same time as he is staring all round him and expounding his point of view, my whole universe were disintegrating on the spot; as if the objects which constitute my universe, while still remaining stationary, were flowing away from it and towards this strange apparition. “Suddenly, an object is presented before me which has stolen the world away from me.” In so far as another-person is an object for me, this disintegration of my universe is confined to the bounds of my universe; it does not escape into nothingness or withdraw outside itself; rather does it seem to be rent by a gap of emptiness in the middle of its being, and to flow interminably through this gap.

Nevertheless, if, when I consider my state of being and my universe as objects, the damage seems moderate, and if the piercing of my universe by another-person leads only to an internal flow from that universe—from the time I consider my personal presence in the world—I see myself, as far as I am concerned, being impelled towards another-person in a sort of external hæmorrhage. It is, in fact, my freedom, that is to say, the most intimate part of me, which is drained off by him. I *am* this *being-for-another-person* which I become when I am confronted with him, but I cannot get rid of him. He is no longer a for-oneself, a mobile and potential human being; he is an in-oneself, a petrified, immobilized and undetachable form of existence.

Thus, the impingement of another-person, far from bringing me promise of a harvest, merely sows the seeds of death and damnation. “The existence of another-person is the cause of my Original Sin.” It is the cause of my Original Sin and of my Eternal Damnation, because death, in the minds of those who survive me, and of all future generations, definitely turns me into a for-another-person type. “Hell is the presence

⁹ (“I’m spotted!” “I’m nabbed!” = “*vu*,” “*fait*.” M. Mounier likes to have a dig at Sartre’s use of slang: “*Vu!*” and “*Fait!*” are slang terms, particularly associated with Paris pickpockets’ “warning code”—on hearing either of these words, other pickpockets in the vicinity “lay off” until the “coast is clear” again. The phrase: “I’m robbed!” would thus seem to be synonymous in the sense of the old story about the Scotsman who “lost” sixpence because someone else picked it up before he could.

of others."¹⁰ It is through the agency of another-person that, quite literally, I fall into the world, and that my whole being is drained out of me, and that I am exposed defenceless.¹¹ Once another-person has taken possession of me, there is no longer any hope for me. I am no longer an expression of freedom which can create and project itself. I am in danger of enslavement and of being handed over to a scheme of valuations which I never succeed in obtaining. At the moment of attack, I irrevocably become what I am. The presence of another-person strikes right at my heart; it removes all the value from the secret state of what I am. It is easy to understand the feeling of uneasiness which comes over me from the moment a stare is fixed on me.

I have only one means of salvation; it is tit-for-tat. I must regain my freedom, I must reconstitute myself as a subject, and, *in order to do this* (we must emphasize this phrase in the same way as we did the "that is to say" earlier), I, in my turn, must petrify another-person into an object, because, obviously, the process can be reversed. He is certainly a dangerous object to handle, for, at any moment, he may reassume his spontaneity as a subject. Moreover, my constant worry, in the course of my relations with him, will be to reveal enough cunning to keep him an object as long as I can. But one conquering stare from him is sufficient to bring my whole sheltering edifice crashing down in one second.

Right at the start, however, we find one fundamental means of defence in the factor of modesty—if I wrap myself up in myself, if I am retiring by nature, if I keep my feelings to myself, I decrease my range of display of myself, and I can claim the privilege of seeing without being seen, and of becoming an abstract-subject who cannot be materialized by any stare from another-person. But this is still only a defensive attitude, and "the best form of defence is attack." Conflict is the fundamental basis of being-for-another-person.¹² Two men together represent two beings who are lying in wait for the opportunity to enslave each other in order that they can avoid being enslaved. Now, there are two ways of retaliating, by taking the offensive, open to us.

The former is the more ambitious: Since another-person enslaves me by means of his subjective-liberty, I should aim *at this very otherness, at his freedom*, not as an object, but as a perceiving-being myself, in order to exorcise, as it were, on the spot, the overwhelming power that he has over me. Such is the ideal of love. It does not, as is imagined,

¹⁰ It was the theme of *Huis Clos* (a play by Sartre which was, incidentally, played privately in London in 1946, with the title: *Vicious Circle*.—E.B.).

¹¹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 321.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 431.

seek possession of a body—it does not want to possess a body so much as a corpse—it seeks a form of freedom as freedom. Another-person-(object) cannot suffice to arouse love; love can only arise from the desire of another-person-(subject). Now, this desire is a desire for revenge, it is the desire of yesterday's slave to triumph over yesterday's master; at no point is it a desire for reconciliation. In order that I may be assured of this triumph, the freedom of another-person must not only be engaged, but it must also become my captive. My handicap, my tendency to objectivity, my factness combine to infect another-person with it since another-person is infecting me with it.

For Sartre, this is what constitutes the basis of the ecstasy of love. Once the proposition is stated, there is no harm in showing that this project involves contradiction. I do, in fact, desire that another-person should become embedded in my freedom, and that he should do so freely, since I want to possess him as a manifestation of freedom. Therefore, I require him to be an object, while all the time I really want him to be a subject. Moreover, in order to take possession of him as a subject, I *must* (I again use italics) still remain an object as far as he is concerned, and even an attractive object, too. But I (subject) no longer take possession of him all of a sudden, as I had anticipated. The force of this impotence can induce me furiously to regard myself as an object, just like a child punching himself, or just as a man reviles himself and becomes depressed after a defeat—such is the meaning of Masochism.

The “communion of souls” thus being admittedly impossible,¹³ I then go on to try communion of bodies. Since I cannot take possession of this freedom as freedom, I go on to try to embed it in its own corporeality (in its “factness”) and to entrap it in another way—but in its own trap and no longer in mine. There are different tactics for this particular strategy.

I can objectify another-person by means of indifference. In this case, I act as if he were not staring at me. I ignore him, and sometimes I mock him. Then I am at ease; I am not estranged; I am in the inverse state to timidity or shame. For some people, the vulgar sort (that particular type of “Dirty Beasts”), this state can last a whole lifetime. I remain in danger of being classed as a thing by another-person—I am, of course, but I no longer realize the fact. I have partaken of the death of another-person—my death.

An investigation, analogous to this, arouses sexual desire. Sexuality is not a function dependent on my body, but a necessary component of

¹³ On this subject, see *La Nausée* again, p. 137, and p. 148.

my being, a fundamental projection of my type of existence. It is I who desire—but we must be more precise. It is I, sinking into the quicksands of the factness of my body, experiencing my own body as a fainting-fit to which I succumb. It is I, making myself flesh in the presence of the flesh of another-person in order to try to appropriate her flesh. I must, at the same time, make her into flesh, for she herself is not basically flesh; she is being-in-a-situation, clad, not only in her garments but in a thousand individual and social bonds. I must undress her. Then I am reassured. She is no longer anything but this very flesh which has been restored to its immediate confines by my hands. She is no longer in danger of overflowing as the result of her freedom. She, in her turn, is under a spell. Possession is thus an attempt to achieve reciprocal twofold incarnation—but, at the same time, it can only end in frustration, because, if I do continue to enjoy my triumph, then, by the very way in which it acts, I find myself merely possessing a corpse, and not “another-person”—in fact, instead of being master of the situation, I myself am thereby sinking into the quicksands. By its very efflorescence, the flesh of another-person is unpossessable. This fact is the cause of the mad rage of the Sadist, who tries to humiliate this flesh of another-person in order to destroy the freedom which he cannot subjugate.

We have all experienced the irritation which results from those little breakdowns in a piece of machinery caused by two parts which have reciprocal functions being blocked. If you free one part, you immediately block the other; the second part, in its turn, gets blocked, and so the process goes on. According to Sartre's scheme of things, our unfortunate experience with another-person is the result of a similar sort of process. I do aim at taking possession of the subject as a subject, but, whenever I present myself as a subject, it is petrified into an object. Therefore, since I am faced with its subjectivity, I can only present myself as an object incapable of affecting it. It must be capable of being revealed to me simultaneously as an object and as a subject. Now, this is impossible. “In principle, another-person represents the unpossessable; he avoids me whenever I try to possess him, and he possesses me whenever I am trying to avoid him.”¹⁴ Sartre considers that this state of impotence lies at the source of the feelings of guilt and hatred. Hatred is hatred of the transcendence of another-person—it represents a desperate attempt to suppress his transcendence.

Had Sartre entitled this chapter of his book, in the style of medical

¹⁴ *La Nausée*, p. 479.

treatises, simply: "Ontological Investigation of One Type of Being-for-Another-Person," we could only have welcomed it as a remarkable analysis of one of the outstanding attitudes we assume in relation to another-person. Actually, we disagree with Sartre only at the stage where his analysis assumes the exclusion of all other possible experiences, and claims to be the *ne varietur* account of being-for-another-person. Referring back to the distinction between the authentic and the unauthentic—that it is impossible to dissect every apposite incidence—we should say that the Sartrian description is a description of unauthentic being-for-another-person.

But, let us get back to the basic analysis.

The first view is that held by all types of Existentialism: I cannot get at another-person by setting him up as an object in front of an I-subject; the only way I can do it is by means of the *presence of another-person* which is recognized as a fundamental fact of my existential experience. According to Gabriel Marcel, if I begin to postulate, in the Cartesian manner, that the essence of my being is consciousness of myself within the isolation of an individual *Cogito*, then there is no longer any way of escaping from it and of disembodying into other-persons. He notes, moreover, that my subjective-self can only cause itself to exist within the *Cogito* by keeping its distance with regard to itself; by treating itself as a being perceived by an inward other-person. The dialectic of another-person, like transcendence, is a movement (which is simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal) towards an *Intimius intimo meo*. In one sense, therefore, there is only another-person who fundamentally exists. He haunts me.¹⁵ Thus, there is no doubt that there is within the oneness of a fundamental intuition a *Sum ergo es*,¹⁶ which, from one particular aspect, might, in more specific terms, be a *Videor ergo es*.¹⁷

Ambiguity starts when we try to determine the nature of this stare which I fix on another-person or which another-person fixes on me. Sartre has not taken his analysis of it deep enough. From the time we make an investigation into the symbolical meaning of this stare, the perfectly clear and analytic meaning, we are in danger of reconverting the stare into the technical operation which it seems to us to be at the first investigation, i.e. to determine (that is to say "fix") the nature of something in order to take possession of it—provided these words are understood in both their physical and their cognitive senses. Now,

¹⁵ *Être et Avoir*, p. 150—51.

¹⁶ I am, therefore you are.

¹⁷ I seem to be, therefore you are.

the stare undoubtedly thus has its useful function of fixing the movement of things or beings, and of taking from them ("take" another typically Sartrean word of double-meaning!)¹⁸ of taking from them, at a distance, what is needed to make the individual complete and fully capable. But the stare is reduced to this fundamental purpose to no greater extent than I am reduced to my mere actions. The stare exercises its purpose to excess. From behind itself, it throws the most direct light on personal being; it is the main channel of invocation from one person to another. In its capacity as perpetrator of vile deeds, it petrifies us and takes possession of us; in its capacity as the spokesman of inward sovereignty, it summons us and proposes to us.

If you read through Sartre's analysis again you will find nothing to call to mind this fundamental being of the stare. The stare fixed on me by another-person *robs* me of the world. It embezzles the patrimony which my own stare had amassed for itself. It estranges me and it takes possession of me. To counteract it, I must, in my turn, surround it, banish it and subjugate it. The whole state of affairs is like two land-owners quarrelling over the ownership of some property, never like two human existences exchanging their surplus qualities. In common with every other form of Existentialism, Sartre aims at eliminating basic outwardness from the description of human beings. But, in his description of the stare, he introduces the concept of absolute outwardness and extends his description to include the most intimate human contact. Here, he shows an insight which is surprisingly like that of a persecuted man. We should certainly prefer not to have this remark taken as an "Existential psycho-analysis" of Sartre's train of thought—the connexions between a personality and the ideas which it expresses are not necessarily direct! We shall be quite satisfied with establishing one outstanding descriptive connexion.

The paranoid is a being for whom the substance of the world is impoverished simultaneously with a morbid exacerbation of his consciousness of himself. The impoverished consciousness that he has of being gives him the feeling that, whoever shares in it, shares *his* part with him. From then on, another-person no longer appears to him except in the guise of a threat, of a potential encroachment on his preserve. Everything which surrounds him worries him and is lying in wait to pounce on him. His universe is a concentric universe of threat and malice of which he is the irritable centre. It is not only perceived

¹⁸ The double meaning seems to be the sense in which, for instance, when slapping a naughty child, we might say, "Take *that*!"

being that he transforms into hunted-being; just as when you have a sore spot somewhere, you avoid touching it, so he shrinks from even the slightest contact, so that it seems as if, as far as he is concerned, that happy state in which we find ourselves in the world did not exist. Similarly, Sartre refuses to consider the for-another-person as anything else but an encroachment, the conquest of good, and the subjugation of self. We are acquainted with the extent of the affective value attached to the state of affected-being, which is the basis of Nausea, in his novels as well as in his philosophical works.¹⁹ The stare is only fleeting. The world of staring seems to establish the icy solitude of the paranoid universe. "Nobody. Antoine Roquentin exists for nobody."²⁰

It is not necessary, however, to go right to the extreme of paranoia before the plan of the world implied in the Sartrean conception of the for-another-person can be discerned. His scheme of things simply paints a picture of the world of possessiveness. This "I," which seeks to contaminate another-person with its inward wickedness, is inspired to do so by resentment against this very wickedness which it confesses to. It is no longer a form of basic freedom from the beginning, it is no longer an intact subject. Nevertheless, what is this wickedness? Is it a kind of "factness" which seemingly comes to me from outside, from my fundamental position in the world? We shall go further than Sartre down the very same road he has shown us, the road on which we prohibit fatal accidents so that the existent may be given complete responsibility for himself. The wickedness which refuses to allow me to transmit various freedoms or forms of existence (a formula which is preferable to "transmit forms of consciousness"), is a type of wickedness which I myself create, from the moment I make myself undetachable. Here again, we meet this concept of undetachableness which assumes such pride of place in Gabriel Marcel's philosophy.

Undetachability, as we have seen, begins at the very heart of the relationship which I maintain with myself. The stare of another-person is not the only thing which has power to fixate me as an object. If I shut the egocentric curvature down on myself, if I make myself master of myself, I develop within myself an opaqueness, which is the basis of the opaqueness which I subsequently develop in others. Let us recall that when she stood outside the gates of Sodom, it was not through being stared at, but through staring at ("*regardant*") her desires in

¹⁹ "As for objects, they could not *affect*. . . . As for me, they do affect me; it is unbearable. I'm as frightened to come in contact with them as if they were real wild beasts." (*La Nausée*, p. 25).

²⁰ Antoine Roquentin: A character in Sartre's novel, *Nausea*.—E.B.

a certain way that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt. French peasants say: "*être regardant*" for "being mean," or for "to begrudge."²¹

It is not, as Sartre would have it, my freedom which subjugates; it is my previous subjugation to egocentrism. If it still continues to simulate freedom, there is a personal substitution. "To be undetachable—to be wrapped up in oneself."²² What expressive phraseology! "Wrapped up in oneself"—full of oneself. And here we come up against Sartre's "too full," against the static and unproductive in-onself. We shall even suggest to Sartre a wonderful Sartrean metaphor he hasn't yet thought of—the man for whom the perfect example of being clogged is to be clogged in syrup, (the wasp being gradually sucked down in a pot of jam). Full of oneself—to use an everyday expression, you could also say "candied!"²³ This fundamental undetachableness is a shortened form of possessiveness.²⁴ Anguish at the thought of my possessions being exposed to the ravages of time makes me wrap myself jealously round them again, and the thought that they can be worn out or entirely used up makes me jealous of myself and gives me a misanthropic view of the world. It is at this stage that this fundamental attitude pivots from myself to another-person. The other-person is the man who threatens my worldly possessions; he no longer appears to me solely as a potential encroachment or as some acquisition which can be classified. (Kierkegaard's "interesting state" is an æstheticized form of this latter view).²⁵ Thus, it is through a previous project of undetachableness, and not through my freedom as a subject that I take possession of another-person as an object; it is on the same basis that I am reduced to receiving him as an invader, too.

The whole business is different if I place myself, with regard to myself and to another-person, in an attitude of detachableness. I now no longer think of myself as a being-to-be-protected. I am "open to" the world and to another-person. I submit myself to their influence, and without either systematic calculation or systematic mistrust. It would be appropriate here to analyse a number of sensations which are strongly decried by egocentric intelligence. *Admiration*, for instance.²⁶

²¹ *Être et Avoir*, p. 13—14.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²³ "Full of oneself" = "full of one's own importance." "Candied"—the French text has "*confit*" which has the literal meaning, "candied" and the sarcastic meaning "steeped in" as in the French phrase: "*confit en sainteté*" (oozing holiness)—E.B.

²⁴ *Être et Avoir*, pp. 122, 148, 217.

²⁵ *Du refus* . . . , p. 98—99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

In this sensation, I submit myself to an irruption, the very nature of which is to tear me away from myself and from thinking about myself. Refusal to admire anything is a refusal to allow oneself "to revolt," that is to say, precisely, the refusal, or the acquired incapacity, to maintain, in face of the gaze of another-person, that creative vitality characteristic of the for-oneself which can, when it is on the right wavelength, create support for a fresh burst of vitality. This, again, is a *creative form of vitality*. It is not only a form of constancy analagous to the immutability of a law; it is not only a fixed identity of the Sartrean in-oneself type. It is, in addition, a type of presence which is always at the disposal of another-person, and, consequently, always fresh. (We are reminded of the Kierkegaardian "repetition"). It is creative because, since the notions concerning my attachment are modified on the way, it perpetually reclassifies the continuity of its life.²⁷ As far as such experiences as these are concerned, the presence of another-person, instead of petrifying me, appears, on the contrary, to be a beneficent influence, and undoubtedly a source of regeneration and creativeness.

Here, we must take up the analysis of the stare again. We have already accused Sartre of eliminating from the concept of the stare the only form of stare which *fixates*. Now, on the contrary, the most significant type of stare is an *overwhelming* stare. Provided I welcome the presence of another-person as something which I do not detach myself from, the stare which he fixes on me does not immobilize me, although, in quite a different way, it deranges me; it upsets me; it puts me in doubt. It plunders me, in fact, but it is then part of myself, as the enemy of myself, of my egocentric opaqueness, of that encumbrance and of that screen which I am for myself in my solitude. Experience is always teaching us the informative value of the advice which other-people give whenever they are kind enough to give it, or the informative value simply of the clearness of mind which they arouse in us by the dead weight of their stare. On our own, we badly misunderstand ourselves and badly misjudge ourselves. Scandal-mongering is almost always right to a much greater extent than introspection is. Thus, it is not only the kindly stare of another-person which inspires us, but it can also be the hostile or jealous stare or the stare of indifference, provided I am, when I receive it, in a state of detachableness. This experience holds equally well for groups as it does for individuals. It is a form of seclusion amounting to Existential slumber

²⁷ *Être et Avoir*, p. 39, et seq.; *Du refus* . . . , p. 199, et seq.; *Homo Viator*; Chap. — *Fidélité et obéissance*.

on the part of the in-oneself. The stare which Atheism fixes on Religion, which the Opposition fixes on the Government, which pupils fix on their teachers is the principal ingredient of their vitality. Köhler has proved that intelligence is opposed to instinct because it introduces the notion of detour as a means of surmounting an obstacle. The longest way round for my hand to reach an object is often the shortest way home to satisfaction of my desire. Similarly, it would seem that, in so far as knowledge and mastery of myself are concerned, the safest route for myself to reach myself is via the detour provided by another-person. Thus, another-person is the co-operator of my most intimate spiritual life, and we may agree with Gabriel Marcel that, consequently, spiritual life is "the ensemble of the actions by which we tend to reduce within ourselves the part played by undetachableness."

The presence of another-person would, perhaps, not have this effect if it were only a social presence, and perhaps it is because Sartre's concept of transcendence is only projective that it cannot go beyond the horizontal plane of encroachment. There certainly is, in the perceived-being, even a state of undetachableness—in the case of vanity, for example, there is an attempt at gratuitousness, which is noticeable higher up the scale in the case of the sentiment of dignity or honour. One minute, I am enjoying a feeling of wellbeing or enjoying my being itself through a burst of homely contemplation—and the next minute, I am furtively offering to share it with another-person, or, taking a higher view, I am offering to share it because of the common pride we both have in being men.

Gabriel Marcel says that what I possess is what I can display—using the word in its double sense—and, consequently, even vanity represents a form of half-display.²⁸ This offer to share is, however, soon withdrawn, for selfish reasons. In order that the other-person should no longer be my rival, I must experience, through him, and within myself, and in the world, the state of inexhaustibility. Actually, I do experience it through a type of transcendence which has no connexion with Sartre's type of transcendence except the name.

The difference between these two types of transcendence will be quite clear if we compare Sartre's analysis of shame with the analysis of *modesty* made by the Christian branch of Existentialism. First of all, it is significant that Sartre has introduced into this knotty dialectical problem a concept which, although seemingly a notion of privacy, is actually much more of a social concept than modesty is. Kierkegaard

²⁸ *Être et Avoir*, p. 234.

had previously said that modesty is existence in so far as it cannot be adequately expressed. Modesty becomes modesty when it meets face to face the Transcendent Power which is contained in it, and not only when it encounters another-person. Following Jaspers, Soloviev has taken up a study of this analysis.²⁹ Modesty and the feeling of moral shame both prove that there is a kind of identity between my objectivated, corporate or social nature and my existence. I am not ashamed, *when confronted with another-person, to possess such a nature*. I am not ashamed, for example, to occupy a position in space, or of my faculty of intelligence. When confronted with another-person, I am not ashamed to exercise an activity which is accompanied by a sense of my own worth, in so far as the spreading of its influence is concerned—in so far as it is transcended. Nevertheless, I am ashamed *of having nothing else besides that particular nature*, or rather, of seemingly having nothing else (especially as I feel that I have the potentiality to be worth infinitely much more than that). Moreover, because of the appeal and the reproach of another-person, I am ashamed that I am required to be worth infinitely much more than that. This is what explains why one particular aspect of myself, or one particular perfectly natural aspect of behaviour—sexual behaviour, for example—can excite the feeling of shame, if attention is focussed on its restrictive side rather than on its active side.

This type of shame does not affect the positive side of behaviour. It reminds me that I am not only the passive instrument of nature, and her purpose. Thus, man might be defined as a being capable of feeling ashamed—I am ashamed, therefore, I exist, in the full sense of the word.

I exist as a transcendent being, created to be perpetually detaching himself—from himself, from his passions, from his actions, and from the paralyzing effect of his own perfections.

One could analyse *scorn* in the same way. A scornful attitude towards other men (and, *ipso facto*, towards ourselves) is an attitude inseparable from an active realization of our perpetual betrayal of existence. But, we may have a type of *inert-scorn*, a sort of “proud” scorn, in which case it can lead only to a sort of sterile isolation, or to the desire for power. Scornfulness may qualify the promise of transcendence, but, all the same, it can be a powerful incentive to spiritual resurgence. Like defiance, it is a revelation-in-reverse of transcendence, but, all the same, it ultimately represents the same thing as generosity.

The with-another-person, the *us*, conforms very closely to the concept that has been evolved of the for-another-person.

²⁹ *La Justification du Bien*, Ed. Montaigne.

For men like Scheler, Buber, or Gabriel Marcel, Existentialism introduces into the concept of spiritual-communion between subjects, the notions of exchange of ideas and of authentic encounter, following which I do not treat another-person as an aspect of nature, but as an aspect of freedom, and by which, in addition, I contribute towards his freedom in the same way as he contributes towards mine. Thus, since another-person is not a handicap for the my-ego, but the actual basis of it, the discovery of the us is still directly contemporaneous with personal experience. The *thee* represents what we discover ourselves and with its assistance we rise to higher stages. It surges into the midst of immanence, just as it does into the midst of transcendence. It does not break up the intimacy; it reveals it and raises it to higher stages. The encounter with the us not only facilitates an integral exchange between the I and the thee but also creates a universe of experience which previously had no reality without it.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, this type of universe represents the upper limit of an aspiration whose fate it is to remain empirically unsatisfied. Kierkegaard believes that repetition is finally overcome, and must yield to the rare and difficult interposition of Individual to Individual, an operation which never entirely overcomes the opposition of the secret state. As far as Jaspers is concerned, it is only objective spiritual-communion which is easy to achieve, the sort of objective spiritual-communion which is offered by economic, political and verbal associations. He takes great care, of course, not to underrate the importance of these associations, at their own levels of reality; they are indispensable for us if we want to attain higher forms of spiritual-communion; they are a sort of medium for this process. But, even if the existent has his roots and his base there, he cannot find any fulness there. The only thing that can provide it is intercourse between existents, and to achieve this I must first of all be certain of my existence; I can do so only by means of and with the help of another-person, and in the hope that he will be settled in his state of personal moral-truth in the same way that I am trying to settle myself in my own state of personal moral-truth. Yet, the solitude necessary for any Existentialist progress insures that this state of co-operation will be just as much a struggle and a tearing-apart as it will be a state of love and spiritual-communion. Spiritual-communion, however, can never entirely overcome the tearing-apart effect of being. According to Jaspers' line of thought, at the stage it was in 1939, there is no established kingdom of existents, although, in the midst of the

⁸⁰ Cf. Maurice Nédoncelle: *La Réciprocité des Consciences*, Ed. Montaigne, 1942.

darkness of separation, there is a discontinuous firmament of exalting visitations which are sufficient to encourage in us a decided preference for remembrance and hope, which is stronger than the powerful effects of our solitude.

In the wake of Heidegger, we certainly find assertion of the notion of spiritual-communion. As far as Heidegger himself is concerned, the human being is a *Mitsein*, a with-being, as well as a for-being—the exact opposite of tools, which are only *for* use³¹ and nothing else. My world is a *Mitwelt*, a with-world (another-person). The *Mitsein* is no longer a permanent empirical state; I can really only attain it by living an authentic life; underneath it, there is only a state of association of interests and preoccupations. But, according to the theory of this *Mitsein*, we have a certain amount of difficulty in finding its being and its fulness. To some extent it is subservient to another-person, but it is so in a blind and negative way, as it were; in the same way, actually, as it is when operating between beings whose absolute abandonment has been obvious from the very start. According to Heidegger, the man who is conscious of the vanity of being and of life has no desire to be mixed up with the fate of another-person; he has too much respect for another-person—a weak sort of theory, there seems little chance of any spiritual-communion ever developing out of it. In a case of ontological abandonment, direct spiritual-communion is decidedly impossible. What is wanted to put an end to this fundamental solitude is an initial facing up to a threat, and an effective exchange of ideas. What would be left in its place?

Sartre thinks he has found in his master's philosophy a link similar to the link between members of a team, a team exemplifying men partaking of a dull existence in common only because of the fact that they have a job to do. Yet, although the individual members live in a silent world of solitude juxtaposed with other solitary worlds, they are thrilled through and through by the thought of working as a team. From this comparison with a team it is easy for Sartre to change to a comparison with a slave-galley. He is correct in noting that this with-being denies itself by reason of its very generality; its generality bars all concrete relationship between my personal state of being and any other similar concrete state of being; it prevents any encounter with another-person.

However, it is not only this generality which is at fault; it is the very ontology which Sartre inherits from Heidegger. Sartre has the merit

³¹ "For"—I believe this is another very subtle jest at Sartre's frequent use of prepositions in newly-coined phrases. The italics, in this case, are mine.—E.B.

of not evading the fact that it is impossible to establish spiritual-communion between subject and subject. For Sartre, there undoubtedly is an us-object experience, exemplified in a crowd, or in consciousness of class-oppression. But such an experience is nothing but a collective and fatal state of being clogged by a mass of strange existents; it is a depressing experience, and, as such, offers no ontological hope.

As far as existence based on the us-object type, the liaison between subjects, is concerned, Sartre categorically denies it. There certainly is a psychological experience of this type—the feeling that I am in the vicinity of others—but it has no ontological basis. “Subjectivities remain out of reach and fundamentally separated from each other.”³² Moreover, these others are never anything but anonymous-impersonal-others, and I drift along as an anonymous-impersonal being in the midst of a lot of other anonymous-impersonal beings. I am a thin film of plankton³³ with no more substance than a reflexion in the water.

However, we must stick to the analysis which has already been made of the for-oneself.

“The essence of the relationships between modes of consciousness is not the *Mitsein*, it is conflict.”³⁴ Wherever *we two* does not succeed in materializing, there can be no *we people*. There can only be a sort of brotherhood of the damned in which each member is a stranger to everyone else and a stranger to himself as well—a *stranger*, and not *another-person*.

³² *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 498.

³³ “Plankton”—Collective term for the minute plant and animal organizations floating or feebly swimming or drifting on, or just below, the surface of lakes, rivers and seas.—E.B.

³⁴ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 502.

VI

THE REVEALED TYPE OF LIFE

MOBILITY, intensity, assertion, attachment—all the notes of the Existentialist craze seem to constitute a battle-hymn and a song of action.

Examined more closely, however, things are somewhat complicated. Action, for instance, just like interpersonal relationship and like a state of being, may be regarded either from the point of view of its objective apparent-reality, i.e., in so far as it represents observed or efficacious action—gestures and results—or according to the inward relationship which the subject maintains with his action; for example, action which is actually experienced, or authentic action—intention and finality. Complete action covers the two fields. It spreads out from the intention to the result, and from the authentic to the efficacious; if the element of authenticity is absent, it paves the way for a world of determinative factors from which the element of performance is absent—so much so that such a world can quite genuinely be conceived; it is an entirely exteriorized world of causes and effects, of edifices and machinery, such as Determinism would like to think it is. But, without any adherence to the plan for achievement, and without a passion for efficiency, action would melt away into mere day-dreaming, or become merely passive.

Does the Existentialist reaction against the imperialist developments of the notion of outwardness threaten to throw us back on to this passive side of action? Is defiance going to develop, with regard to revealed action, a worthless mysticism of *non*-action, just as there already is a worthless mysticism of *non*-consciousness; is it going to develop an attitude of apraxism, on the same lines as agnosticism? Is it going to produce feeble caricatures of the complete ascetic or the exact opposite of him (both of which will create the same effect)? Does this notion of excessive inwardization of action, by removing us from objective controls, and by deflecting to itself our interest in the search for intensity, not run the risk of handing us over to a sort of *frenzy of action for action's sake*, as the result of which both the subject who is acting and his concern about the result of his action are simultaneously lost sight of?

At first sight, there seems nothing stranger than the inclusion of the first of these issues in a philosophy of decision such as Kierkegaard's. But we still have to consider one very strange fact about the actual existence of this Existential thinker. Why did this philosophical advocate of attachment, when he was on the verge of marriage and of entering the ministry, recoil when faced with a clearly-defined attachment? Was it a sudden whim, or was it parental disapproval, or was it, perhaps, an attack of romantic uneasiness? But, as far as a philosopher is concerned, whims and legacies and social atmosphere are no bar to reflective thinking, and seldom exert an influence that has no intimate connexion with his view of the world. Any psychological explanation of Kierkegaard's behaviour is unsatisfactory. In the Danish theologian's works, we have already come across the notion of a movement of the existent towards the exceptional, towards the hidden and towards the inexpressible, and this notion reveals a fundamental tendency to recoil from anything banal, from any form of publicity and from social intercourse. This movement is certainly basically theological, and even theocentric. It seems to prove that Kierkegaard often exhibited a one-track mind. We can, of course, claim that Kierkegaard resisted lower-order types of attachment (those of the ethical order), in favour of higher-order types of attachment (religious ones), and we can recall the fact that he died in the course of the struggle to attain his ideal. But this particular struggle was of the "agin the government" type, and, if it would be presumptuous to pass judgment on Kierkegaard's particular attachments, we may legitimately draw attention to the fact that they always led him to emphasize the sterner side of life at the expense of the potential side.

At the core of Jaspers' ontology, we find an outlook similar to the idea that reverse is the essential factor in every human project. Sartre has the same conviction, and, for him, life is not only a much-handicapped undertaking, but also always an abortive one.¹ Both men have in their minds the hallucinating picture which Kafka paints of this universe of reverses in *The Castle*, and in *The Trial*. It represents life as an interminable and exhausting journey, every step of which takes us further away from the goal we are aiming at. Kafka also developed the notion of passion for the mystery of the world to such an extent as to outweigh the importance of it, and eventually produce a sort of large-scale impotence. It is undoubtedly a fact that such an insistence on the inherent futility of action may, for the majority of people, weaken the mainspring of

¹ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 621, and p. 651: "The story of any particular life is the story of a reverse."

action, despite the fact that some people derive their urge to act from it. Why construct anything, if all human projects are absurd? Why help man, if man is despicable? Why lend him a helping hand, if that hand is doomed never to grasp his? Why chase after transitory and illusory success, if, in the end, it leads to an inevitable reverse?

In Europe to-day, a sort of powerlessness to achieve anything seems to be affecting the best minds, except when they happen to be inspired by either Communist or Christian fervour. In the youthful enthusiasm of newly-rising societies, biological-urge and spiritual energy closely integrate their forces without anyone feeling the need to talk about efficacy or about attachment. When this ardour is dampened, propaganda is introduced to compensate for the diminishing energy. A vogue for controversy is far less often evidence of the attainment of some reality than it is of feelings of remorse or of frustrated desires. Any civilization will start preaching Existentialism, and advocating action the moment it no longer feels sure of its existence and its powers of action are faltering.

We realize that, on the one hand, Existentialism asserts the need for complete execution of any human act. We also realize that, because (like defensive ontological reaction) it is grafted on partial detachment, it sometimes denies its own tenets under pressure from the very evil it has aroused. Existential recoil in face of action no longer always or solely exemplifies a need for subjective being, which in previous times more surely demonstrated its powers; it does, however, reveal a temporary condition of anæmia which the Existentialist reaction (whence its ambivalence) simultaneously conceals and struggles against.

Nevertheless, Existentialist tradition is unanimous about the mobilization of a coalition of our triumphant powers against the evil side of action.

Its power in this struggle is enormous when existence is supported by a real transcendence which flows into it, summons it and sustains it. The number and the importance of the reverses are negated through the constancy of the summons and its unlimited power of arousing response. Nevertheless, reverse brings a positive attitude into this perspective. It is not reduced to the objective fact of limitation or a halt; it is a manifestation of deceit. Now, deceit implies fear of a super-being. It would have no meaning unless it included the perception of something which could have been affected and which has not been. There is an abyss between experience of reverse and nihilism, between interrupted action and fruitless action. Action is perpetually dying,

but, it is also perpetually resuscitated, because the directive meaning of action does not die.

According to Jaspers, whenever hope seems to betray me in my state of hopefulness, I can no longer remain faithful to such a dead hope. The authentic being of reverse is not its empirical being, that is, the limitation which it imposes on action, but it is the way in which it is taken up and transformed. The constant theme of such a view of action is the concept of *resurgence*; its myth is the myth of the Phoenix, or possibly, the myth of The Flood.

Such a concept had already been introduced by the Kierkegaardian notion of repetition, "an exuberant swelling of inwardness," "the same thing, and yet, a variation of it, and yet, the same thing."² Repetition represents the perpetual knitting up of the ravelled sleeve of Time by the tireless needle of Eternity. And, certainly, there is no question of metaphysical consolation, or of an artful return to ontological optimism behind the scenes of the world. For Jaspers, this renaissance is always being halted; inexorable rejections are always preventing any clearly-defined reconciliation. But, in the midst of this despair, there is a faint power of hope, and this will eventually be sufficient to transform the faintest hope.

This inexhaustible reserve does not come to us only from outside us. We should try in vain to reduce a philosophy like Jaspers' to some sort of sublimation of the complexes arising from reverse, which psychoanalysis has discovered in us. The complexes arising from reverse all converge upon some form of inherent depression and inaction. As far as Jaspers himself is concerned, the abortiveness of action, far from depressing the powers of action, diverts us to conditioned action (the gateway to finite and empirical goals which eliminate its worries, and are themselves exhausted) and to unconditioned action (authentic action). In this type of authentic action, we risk all to gain all in the midst of the particular situation, without stopping action to attain ends which are too close and too restricted.

In the whole of this sector of Existentialism, the weakness which affects the eagerness of the being for fullness of existence remains accidental, as far as he is concerned, even though it is complete. It affects a generous and superabundant type of being within us as well as outside us. Its enthusiasm is too short-lived, and is cut short in the middle of its burst; it is not niggardly.

There is, on the contrary, in Heidegger's concept of being, the notion

² *Post-Scriptum*, p. 191. *La répétition*, p. 123. *Le concept d'angoisse*, pp. 212, 216.

of inherent poverty, a sort of *poenia*.³ I believe Jean Wahl has drawn attention to this fact. As far as this *poenia* is concerned, our potentialities, considered from the aspect of their form, are also perpetually rebounding, although this rebounding is a rebounding from a state of nothingness. As soon as we have evolved such a formula as this, we begin to wonder if it isn't sheer gibberish. If you begin by assuming the absence of unauthentic behaviour, how are you going to explain authentic behaviour? Heidegger, like Jaspers, steers us away from the notion of excessive preoccupations with finite goals which also happen to be strongholds of anguish, but he does not advocate neglect of our daily work. He would have us accept the fact of our potentialities without becoming dupes to them—we should treat them as what they actually are, as nothing, as a modified form of annihilation measured in time, as a lucky postponement of death. Except in a theoretic way, or rather, for the sake of argument, they do not and cannot represent a resurgence of existence; they create a method of perceiving, an inward resignation to the nothingness which is within us and in front of us. It would be futile to deny that this form of psychological reorientation can be (at least, in an obscure sort of way) a source of moral power, since this has been shown by certain experiments to be so. But such a moral-force is a force based on voluntary acceptance and not a force based on the idea of resurrection. Here, again, we cannot help noticing, like a sort of filigree of a laicised expression, the opposed notions of two types of traditional theology: first, we have Roman Catholic theology which postulates that man is a being who has been cruelly wronged, but wronged and nothing more. As soon as man accepts Divine Grace, his life is transformed into his being. Secondly, we have Lutheran theology, which regards human existence as a gigantic state of nothingness. Now, although such a notion holds out no hope of any transfiguration this side of the grave, acceptance of it carries with it an unconditional promise of life.

It seems incontestable that a philosophy of hope creates more men of action than a philosophy of despair. This is no argument in favour of those who prefer a philosophy of authenticity to either. It is, however, an argument in favour of those who believe that existence is a maternally solicitous state and that it must continue to play a large part in the spiritual life of men. The philosophy of nothingness may quote in its favour the lonely and insubstantial grandeur of those who happen to be inspired by it. Can such a philosophy ever make a popular evangelical appeal?

³ "*Poenia*"—literally, a penalty. Here it would seem to indicate a deprivation which handicaps the state of being.—E.B.

In his eulogy of the Existentialist hero of this School of Despair,⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty tries to reduce him to more homely proportions. This type of hero is not a sort of envoy-extraordinary; he is not an obscure and useless time-server—what could he serve, seeing that the past is always being outstripped by the present, and that the future seems just as absurd as the present? He is not wrapped up in his misery. The only thing he submits to is “the movement which hurls us hopelessly towards men and towards things.” Such a picture of quasi-Existentialist man is nothing but an unstable composition in which the artist is using the quieter tints of his palette to tone down a highly-coloured but, nevertheless, basically unhuman ethic. It is a system of ethics which denies to man that that side of Existential happiness which is, in fact, his very bread and body, can be anything else but an aristocratic system of ethics. It contains within itself the very same seeds of deceptiveness which it complains about in other types of ethics. To be, to develop, to exist—in a philosophy which can postulate nothingness as the stuff of which existence and courage are made only by flitting ceaselessly from forgetfulness of being, at the moment of philosophising, and from forgetfulness of nothingness, at the moment of action, these words imply a sense and a force of agitation.

The connexion between a philosophy and the consequences of it is loose enough and ambivalent enough for these two types of Existentialism—the type that believes in being, and the type which does not, apart from these fundamental divergences—frequently to have a very similar practical attitude when faced with problems of action.

Just as they reject the idea of systems of philosophy, so they reject the idea of systems of action, because systems represent the protective armour against a form of existence which spontaneously gushes forth and in which, within the otherwise assignable limits of the situation, all things are possible and everything involves a risk. Existential anguish is not a form of debilitating neurasthenia; it is an intimate aspect of this struggle which is always being contested anew, and which is always rebounding; it is an aspect which is continuously revealed by the type of life which is lived dangerously. Kierkegaard, as well as Barth, in his turn, denounces Christian communities, which represent “social-order Christians” who introduce the notion of absolute-authority into relative and reducent goals of religious anguish. Arguing along the same lines, Heidegger denounces utilitarian forms of religion and preoccupation. Jaspers accuses every totalitarian system (States, Religions, Moral

⁴ “Hero-worship,” (*Action*, 1 Feb., 1946).

Systems) of inclining towards this totalitarian imperialism, which, by devitalizing the existential drama, damages the resources of existence. He does not object to the utility of the Law or to its operation as a necessary connexion between the empirical and the existential, and, consequently, as an inward movement of the dialectic. But the concepts of social duty and legal ethics represent only the first stage of Existential ethics, which respond more to a feeling or to some reaction caused by the act of attachment than to the application of the Law. In any case, we can claim that the ethical-state is in a state of constant tension between obligation to the Law and the unconditional nature of pure conscience, between the act which can be universalized and the act which is inimitable—between the Kantian outlook and that of Kierkegaard.⁵

It would be wrong to conclude that such a position is *a priori* hostile to all collective incidence of values. It merely indicates the real dangers inherent in them, as well as refusing to make them the playthings of an isolated ego.⁶ Hence, what, according to this point of view, is lost by systematization is unreservedly gained by personal responsibility. Man, his fate, and the universe itself are subject to its decision. It may even be claimed that, as far as all types of Existentialist thinking are concerned, the decision is divine. It is divine for Kierkegaard, because it very conveniently brings into the world the Eternal Will. One might even imagine a Roman Catholic Kierkegaard delivering a "sermon" in which he symbolized all human decision as the Fiat of the Virgin, a fiat which makes her the Mother of God through the direct influence of the Word and without any human agency, while, at the same time still accepting the ordinary scientific facts of motherhood. As far as the Atheistic branch of Existentialism is concerned, decision is divine in another sense; in the sense that it represents the sovereign lord of existence who perpetually replaces my being back in its existence which is also being perpetually put into a state of jeopardy. The more man's existence is conceived as a form of autarchy (as it is in this latest movement), the more devastating is the responsibility ascribed to the existent. If there is no more spirituality in the world, and no God, superior to spirituality and anterior to the advent of my existence, to represent certain aspects of the world's being; if there is no objective System—e.g., History, or a Dialectic of Revolution, or a Theory of Evolution—to

⁵ This criticism of legalist ethics has been continued on rather similar lines to that of Jaspers by N. Berdyaev in *Freedom and the Spirit* and in *The Destiny of Man*. (There are English translations of both these works—pub. by Geoffrey Bles, Ltd.)—E.B.

⁶ See, for example, the criticism of *Ich der Fichte* by Heidegger.

substitute for these things, then I, the existent, through the act of my bursting into the world, become integrally responsible for myself and for the world. For the Atheistic Existentialist, this represents the practical meaning of the abstract formula: "Existence precedes spirituality." I am not defined beforehand by reason of a spirituality common to all men. I define myself by my acts, and while I am in the process of creating myself, I create my creed; at the same time, too, I am building up a world for myself. In the very least of my acts I attach myself to the whole of humanity.⁷

Our most habitual tendency is to reject this charge, and to play around with anything that offers the possibility of diversion, instead of undertaking our tasks on the serious side of existence; this is Kierkegaard's view.⁸ According to Heidegger, it is the tendency to rid ourselves of anguish in favour of the peaceful opportunities offered by the world of the Impersonal-They, and, as far as Sartre is concerned, it is the tendency to doze our lives away in the world of Dirty Beasts. Existentialism represents a sort of punitive expedition against deserters of this type. Yet, even though it does imply a state of despair which, it may be feared, breaks down the morale of troops taking part in it, it is a summons to militant action and has no attractions for those given to morose meditation. Whether they be Idealist or Materialist, Systems all tend to relieve the individual of his responsibilities, and to throw them on to some sort of machinery, or some ideology or impersonal myth. All Existentialists believe in putting the burdens of the world and the fate of the world on the shoulders of man himself.

Here, Sartre uses an absolute formula: "Without any help, and without any support, man is condemned perpetually to fabricate man."⁹ He thinks, and with reason, that he is the first to point out the full consequences of any coherent philosophy of Atheism by his supposition of the suppression of the bases (such as universal values, general morality, sociological dogmas, etc.) which Atheism retains as substitutes for a Loving God, and as if it regretted the passing of Christian universalism. The existent, who is immediately thrust into the midst of his struggle, is alone in the world, and subject to his own obligation. At this stage, Marxist reaction is inevitable. Marxism remains a form of universalism, and is partly dogmatic. It rejects the notion of this fundamental solitude, or, as it might even be called, this solitude which explodes in the direction of the world and which constitutes humanity. In this case, Marxism

⁷ Sartre: *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 24 et seq.

⁸ Kierkegaard, *Le concept d'angoisse*, p. 211, et seq.

⁹ *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 38.

is nearer to a form of Christian Existentialism (if we ignore a Left-wing of the Reformation) which admits that a basis for the world can exist independently of man's existence, and a reality of the community over and above the reverses caused by social intercourse. But, even if it does bring reality into the environment of man, a Christian form of Existentialism is equally insistent that the individual is responsible for the maximum obligation implied in this reality. Sartre is right in defending himself against Christians who accuse him of discrediting the notion of preference for action; nevertheless, he defends himself very unskillfully—all he does is return the compliment.¹⁰ The eternal value of every one of our acts gives them an importance equal to that with which their absolute autonomy fills them.

Human existence seems to us, then, to be in a state of tension between a superactivation of the subject owing to its eternal or solitary responsibility, and this powerful internal thrust in the direction of non-action. It is a similar tension to that we have already associated with the movement in the direction of non-consciousness by which mystical theories of understanding introduce the dimensional-concept of transcendence into consciousness. No Existentialist thinkers accept this notion of non-consciousness as in any way representing an ethical guide or as a direct principal of conduct. The basis of conduct is, on the contrary, composed of decision, attachment, acceptance of the banal, the transformation of reverse, and of total and prospective responsibility. Non-action (which, in the case of suicide, for instance, can become negative action) is only one dark corner which gives ethical or practical action its dimension of inwardness and smoothes out the ridges which would hem it in too closely and weaken its infinite potentialities. Any destructive act, such as that of Abraham in sacrificing his son at the absolute command of God (according to Kierkegaard's outlook), or the act of suicides, who keep their secret for ever and thus baffle all philosophical judgment, (according to Jaspers' outlook), which destroys the generality of ethics or of practical principles, cannot serve as an ethical model. Nevertheless, it indicates to us that behind all laws the spirit of love, or the spirit of adoration, reigns supreme, and that beyond mere life there is the drama of existence; it indicates that, in the end, success attends the reverse which can inspire us to higher attainment; in brief, it indicates that action cannot be based on limitations, or on any finite goals, or on the

¹⁰ Cf. the conclusion of the pamphlet quoted above, which is like a bit of feeble schoolboy repartee: "It is only through insincerity that Christians, who confuse their own type of despair (what type of despair?) with ours, label us as people filled with despair."—p. 125.

hope of advantageous satisfactions, but that it, also, is basically unfathomable. "All acts are essentially understandable."¹¹ If we want to express in terms of action this intrusion of non-action in the midst of action, we must say that, as far as any Existentialist conception of action is concerned, *efficacy*, on the basis of existence (which by no means excludes other bases) is not the foremost value, but the *sublime* value. "I cannot conceive any better goal in life than that of being dashed to pieces on the sublime, *animae magnae prodigus*."¹² Sartre praises this quotation from Ponge: "Man is man's future." This, however, means nothing unless it is associated with the *leitmotif* of Nietzsche: "Man is created to be outdistanced." Man can attain his fulness only by living above himself. He no more succeeds in maintaining himself in the sublime state than he does in maintaining his success. He can only bear witness to it from time to time, and at random. The general project of human action is a perpetual state of see-sawing and a state of anguish caused by the rival claims of efficacy and witness. The most difficult form of attachment is that which sacrifices neither to the other—or, more correctly, which does ceaselessly sacrifice them the one within the other, without rejecting the idea of life or of survival after it.

This uncomfortable position draws Existentialism towards a danger which is, seemingly, of an opposite kind to the first. When the emphasis is taken off the universal order of things and put on the intensity of attachment, both the content and the capacity of the action are in danger of being grossly undervalued, because of association with the passion for action. In the vanishing world, a sort of senseless and frantic concept of freedom is set up which threatens to be either only a philosophic illusion or else, if its rule is established, and previously-determined limits to the frenzy of existence are assigned by it, it creates a state of completely reversed barriers, regardless of the human or the unhuman aspects.

Here, the fate of Christian Existentialism is not at stake, or, if it is, it is, only as regards certain marginal tendencies which do not fundamentally concern it. In such a case, the freedom of the individual is surrounded and forestalled by a Being who, in order not to possess the logical immobility of objectivated matter, none the less makes no attack against any aspect of the gushing-forth of existence. As far as he is concerned, freedom is an absolute sovereign, though it is, nevertheless,

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Aurora*, Aph. 116.

¹² Prodigal of one's great-mindedness. Nietzsche, *Considérations intempêtes* (*Etudes historiques*, para. 9).

freedom *in the sight of God*, or, to be more accurate, *within God*. At any moment now, the reader is going to wonder if the Existentialist expression of Christianity does not too much obscure the point at which freedom surges into me from Nature's network and so makes a pure fideism out of its basic certitude.

By showing that I live my freedom as a derived state, as a type of resurgence, and that I do not regard it as an object or a state of progression stretched out beneath my gaze (in comparison with the similar but less complete analysis of Bergson), Jaspers is following and developing the arguments of Kierkegaard. Moreover, in my state of freedom, I have a feeling of unqualified certitude, even though it can neither be proved nor given any basis. But, here again, Jaspers is already standing as a solitary figure in between the two types of Existentialism. In a Christian universe, freedom is not predetermined; it is counselled, summoned, welcomed and transformed. Its rise to higher stages is *universal*.

It becomes quite another problem when existence is built upon pure hypothesis in a universe in which it is no longer in the presence of anything—neither in the presence of a God who does not exist nor in the presence of a state of being which flees at its approach. Sartre accuses secular and Radical-Socialist¹³ morality of wanting to do away with God as cheaply as possible. They have both declared that God does not exist—but that this fact will involve no changes. Then, in flat contradiction of this, Sartre aptly points out that, if God does not exist, everything is changed. There are no longer any intelligible values, nor any *a priori* good, nor any inward light. "There is no longer any reality except reality in action."¹⁴ Man is nothing more nor less than the sum total of his acts. Life has no *a priori* meaning; it is up to each and every one of us, by living, to give it some meaning. "Deeds! Above all, and in pride of place, deeds! That is to say, performance, and more performance! You may rest assured that faith, which is a constituent of performance, will be secured by practice!"¹⁵ The line from Nietzsche to Sartre is often just as direct as this.

At this stage, we observe the feeling of worry about inwardness creeping into the passion for intensity. From the moment when man no longer

¹³ RADICAL-SOCIALIST: This might be broadly translated as "Left-wing Liberal." The "Radical-Socialist" party (the name has an ironic flavour in Mounier's style: an antiquated party, now wholly discredited) has represented, in the life of the Third Republic, the "anti-clerical," i.e., anti-Christian ideal.—E.B.

¹⁴ *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 38.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Aurore*, para. 22.

finds within himself anything in the nature of a given experience (using the word "given" in its double sense of "already there" and "offered,") he no longer understands the connexion, the basis of religious devotion, and is satisfied merely with the exaltation associated with it. Sartre speaks more bluntly; as far as he is concerned, there are no innate ideas in man, there are only ways of acting. Hence, from the point of view of human reality, the state of being boils down to action.¹⁶ The purpose of any action is neither received from outside us nor from any inward state of mind—the purpose comes from the action itself. Here we touch upon a point of contact between the Sartrean universe and the Marxist universe. The only difference between the two is that Marxism conceives human reality as a historical whole and not in terms of the discontinuity of individual lives. We should include Luther in any examination of Heidegger's philosophy. Basically, Sartre reminds us of a sort of Lutheran Atheism in which Marx might be regarded as the prototype of St. Paul, that is, as the apostle and founder of the "Church." Yet Luther renounced the Church in order to glorify the Almighty of God over the nothingness of the individual. In order to assert the almightiness of individual nothingness, Sartre renounces the secular God—History (or Causality)—which lurks behind the "churches" and dogmas of Atheism. There definitely must be a Luther to provide the motive power somewhere.

Once freedom is thrown out of its orbit, it is no longer conceivable that it can be given a place anywhere. It is sovereign. What does Determinism mean? Determinism does not represent the conclusion of an experiment; it represents a behaviour of excuse; we might even go so far as to claim that it represents the basis of all types of behaviour of excuse. It objectivates my potentialities by regarding them from the outside, as the potentialities of another man, by transforming them into a solidified "in-oneself," and so causes them to be identified with their results. Thus, there is no longer that disquieting leap from the potentiality to the act; there is no longer that creative abyss which constitutes the very being of our experience of the free act. In its place we have merely a sort of family resemblance, which is somewhat reassuring and which appears to remove the dangers associated with action.¹⁷ What Determinism regards as the causes of our action are merely matters of fact which it considers to be necessary; thus, no matter of fact can constitute any sort of act. The typical working-man of the year 1830 did not act,

¹⁶ *L'Être et le Néant*, 555.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78, *et seq.*

and the reason he did not act was that he still didn't know how to build up a social system in which his grievances would be eliminated.

It is I who, from the point of view of my projects, breathe being into any state of potential mobility, and into my plans and shape them to fit the particular aspect they claim to promote. Here, the psycho-analysis of the mobile state is similar to Spinoza's, but the secret origin of the mobile state, instead of being classed as belonging to a worldly order of things, is relegated to the category of individual immanence. Thus freedom flows within a circuit which is watertight against itself. Man would never learn how to be sometimes free and sometimes a slave; he is either entirely and continuously free or else he is not."¹⁸ Freedom is an "unanalysable totalness."

When you mention the word *total* in connexion with freedom, you immediately think of *arbitrary* freedom. Though Sartre clears himself of this charge, it is undeniable that the Sartrian hero never comes up against the temptations of Gide's notion of untenability; to hold fast to nothing, and to be nothing. Sartre's characters often exhibit such gluttony for existence-by-oneself.¹⁹ To be without any smell and without any shadow and without any past: to be nothing more than an invisible dragging of oneself towards the future."²⁰

But he also feels that this temptation represents the road to a new kind of slavery,²¹ and that choosing to be a man is choosing to possess a *life* and performing acts which cannot be revoked.²²

I would never know how to avoid this temptation, since I am a Being-in-a-situation who is unable at all times to will anything at all. It is at this stage, when I sum up all the restraints which press upon me and all the limitations which hinder the flow of my acts, that, at first sight, I seem to be something which is created rather than something which creates itself. Nevertheless, the Sartrian form of freedom is hardly affected by this network of limitations, and does, in fact, reimpose its sovereignty on them. The obstacle which bars my way is my freedom and it is my freedom which gives it its coefficient of adversity. "Who will free me from this mortal flesh?" exclaims St. Paul. But this mortal flesh only interferes with my spiritual energy because this energy has first of all formulated the project of mastering it. For the man who gives way to its temptations, the flesh is no longer any handicap. The

¹⁸ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 78, *et seq.*

¹⁹ For example, *L'Age de raison*, pp. 17—18, 35, 69, 77, 143, 249.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²² *Ibid.*, 125, 190, 307.

oppressed person can feel himself "free," even under the worst type of dictator, if he has first of all renounced any form of freedom which is too exacting. The past itself does not act in accordance with our conception of how it should—it is not the heritage of 1789 which influences our subsequent French history, but it is our way of interpreting it and operating it. Ultimately, in order for there to be a free act, there must be some obstacle; there must be some distance in between the simple project of some potential end and the realization of the potentiality; there must be some distance between decision and triumph. It is true that, in developing itself and launching itself against the obstacle, freedom, nevertheless, often finds in the end some unassailable bounds; as far as Sartre is concerned, these bounds are evidence of its factness and of the fundamental contingency from which it springs. "We are a type of freedom which makes decisions; we do not decide to be free—we are condemned to be free." Freedom is limited by what it is. Thus, "no matter what plan of action we adopt for ourselves, or what restrictions freedom does come up against, it comes up against them through some form of freedom." There is no accident and no fatality. Everything is an opportunity, or, more correctly, a chance for me.

Here we come upon the most obscure problem in Sartre's philosophy, especially as it is not stated with perfect coherence and clarity. The assertion that I am completely free is juxtaposed, rather than connected, with the assertion that "my freedom depends entirely on the freedom of others,"²³ or that "it conceals a predisposition towards totalness."²⁴ Although it is dramatic enough in its initial stages, Sartre's type of freedom ultimately eschews dramatic appeal, since, in the end, it never actually comes up against any restrictions. Actually, as far as outward observation which objectivates the path taken by freedom is concerned, there is restriction only to the extent to which it is observed. But freedom which is given expression never really comes up against the obstacle, because it creates the obstacle itself, and it never comes up against ultimate limits, not even death, because it has within itself no means of overstepping them. Its limitations are not placed upon it from outside, but by a sort of inherent flabbiness.²⁵

It is impossible here to avoid drawing attention to a subtle movement from Realism to ultimate Idealism. Such a drift seems to be the result

²³ *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 83.

²⁴ *Temps modernes*, No. 1, Editorial: "We have no difficulty in conceiving that a man, so long as his situation completely determines his destiny, may be a nucleus of indestructible indeterminability."

²⁵ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 619.

of a form of freedom which, like the whole of human being, does not ultimately represent superabundance of being but poverty of being. It is, in fact, not even being; like the "for-oneself" with which it is identified, it represents lack of being; it is nothingness. "It is because human reality is insufficient that it is free."²⁶ It is my constant overflow into the nothingness that I am which gives me this nimbleness amongst things; it is my ontological scantiness which makes me so active; it is my aspiration to this gulf of being in me which puts the opportunity and the achievement before me. Freedom does not bring a state of perfection or any meaning into the world; it is nothing but a perpetual inwardization of contingency, nothing but a return to the primitive outburst of absurdity. By very hypothesis, decision is absurd.²⁷

It is ultimately useless to talk about the notion of situation if the concept of encounter with it is eliminated. Could one have such a thing as a limit if one never came up against it? It is useless to build up a pathetic concept of reverse when there is no room in which to create any positiveness for the state of reverse. (Nietzsche rightly observed that the only tragic thing about existence lies in achievement itself). It is there representing an inward necessity for Sartrean ontology. Being is revealed to us by two experiences which, if not entirely incommunicable, are, at least, difficult to connect up: they are the experiences of objectification and of subjectification. From the moment the whole of reality is conceived as outside the realm of pure resurgence and becomes a mere hallucination about the stare of another-person, such a philosophical doubt will lead to a probing of every aspect of being. It will even probe into subjective being which, by the sole fact that it lays claim to being, will retain a bad impression, as it were, of diffused objectivity which it accepts only because of the fact that it is spread throughout, if you can use such a term, within-being. There is, from this moment, a fatal temptation to reduce subjectivity to a form of non-being which is isolated and which gushes forth into the world, which is paradoxically situated in the world and given shape by this fact, but which never actually comes up against the world; it is, in fact, the supreme paradox of a theory of absolute responsibility, a theory by which I am not responsible *in the sight of anything*.

We realize the supreme importance for Kierkegaard of the *in the sight of God* concept. Kierkegaard sticks to his viewpoint and thus saves it from Subjectivism. In this viewpoint, he represents this link with

²⁶ *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 516.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 559.

outwardness which is often isolated and hypostatized by Materialism, but which is, nevertheless, a fundamental manifestation of Existential experience. The Sartrean man stands *in the sight of nothing*, not even (as Liberalism's man does) *in the sight of his conscience*. He does not, I would say, even represent pure subjectivity, but a volatized form of it. The whole problem is to know whether or not our fundamental experience includes proof, not of objects to which I adhere, but of realities to which, as Gabriel Marcel says, I bear witness. If bearing witness lies at the heart of decision, my freedom no longer represents pure resurgence, and I am the witness to it just as much as I am the author of it—I am the usufructuary rather than the possessor. My freedom is no longer a means of *making*, according to the formula which Sartre takes up from Idealism (to be is to be made), but a means of *transformation*; it is a means of enabling me perpetually to transmute the countenance obligations turn on me. But such a form of freedom meets the countenance of things and of beings, a sort of countenance which is at once intimidating because of its powers of obligation and overwhelming because of its potentialities for freedom. We have described such a countenance in the chapter on Other-Person-ness. It allies itself with each and every one of us, but only at close quarters. It represents a conquest. There is no doubt that Sartre and Heidegger do not like the idea of freedom being a conquest. But, in their inability to apply themselves to resuscitating it as being, one really cannot see how they could find any means of getting round the requirements of the stipulations, unless, of course, they did it by a literary tour de force based on the brilliant magic of verbal artifice. Their type of freedom is basically a plain struggle with fate, a fact which is taken for granted.

The opposed viewpoints of the two types of Existentialism now appear quite obvious. "Existentialist Existentialism," if we may be allowed to use such a term, is the type advocated by Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel. It regards action as a state of tension between a creative superabundance and a purifying reflexion. "Non-Existentialism" conceives action as a disputation between an indeterminate and impassioned ethic of action for action's sake (the sort which sometimes tempts the heroes of Malraux or Hemingway), and a sort of unspecified acceptance, amounting almost to a form of constraint, of the necessity of the world. And, by necessity of the world, they mean also the necessity for the world to be unnecessary, the necessity for absurdity and for the preposterous. When man finds his passions useless, he goes in for fruitless action.

The danger in any form of action which is thus thrown out of the orbit of all previous or environmental order is that it will be exposed defenceless to inhuman practices. There have been scurrilous arguments which have tried to connect Sartreism with Naziism. But we must avoid all suggestion of taking sides in a somewhat understandable state of affairs which clouds the issue instead of throwing light on it.²⁸ Nevertheless, it must be clear to the least-informed intellect that, if human nature is depicted to us as entirely and basically a resultant and not a guiding force, nobody in the world has any right to condemn a man or a community which, by the energy of its emotions, tries to force the life of man into some form which glorifies inhumanity. It is true that, if something like a human nature does exist, it can be described only approximately by reference to the whole gamut of the history of man, provided it is admitted that history has any meaning which is not implied beforehand; any given definition of this type of nature during the course of its progress is in danger of being falsified by a fundamental historical prejudice. But, if there is nothing in man superior to history, even if that history be the history of his own freedom, then he may be handed over to history without further comment. As far as Europe was concerned in 1940, all that history meant was servitude—the freedom of the S.S. On its own confession, history was the creator of Dachau. However redoubtable we may consider the blindness and slothfulness of pseudo-spirituality, we must build up a wall against such forms of mental aberration. Now, this wall can be nothing more nor less than a certain conception of man as he is revealed by history, but it must be a conception which acknowledges the superiority of man over history.

²⁸ Here, M. Mounier is being very guarded as to what he says about Sartre's political beliefs. My translation is, perhaps, equally "guarded."—E.B.

VII

EXISTENCE AND TRUTH

WE have, up to now, taken the message of Existentialist philosophy to refer to being concerned with oneself. However, it may be wondered whether it is still possible to speak of philosophy while maintaining that there is no reality other than the individual existent. Some years ago, an interesting controversy took place between M. Jean Wahl and M. Gabriel Marcel. M. Wahl was claiming that, from the Existentialist point of view, it was possible that a good deal more could be learned from a study of the lives of some existents than from a philosophy of existence. M. Marcel aptly replied that nobody could grasp the message of any other living man without the interposition of the code-book known as philosophy.

The whole of existence is ambiguous; I can explain Nietzsche by means of his expressed thought, but I can also do it by means of psycho-analysis and clinical research. According to my predetermined line of philosophy, I shall put questions on this and that; I shall interpret this and that message. Lives are only sources of philosophy—they do not constitute a philosophy.¹

But, anyway, here we are at the embarrassing point as far as Existentialism is concerned. Doesn't the very reflexion which leads us to the discovery of the existent nevertheless shut us up within the high-walled subjectivity of existence? Don't we, in order to free ourselves from worldly disintegration, "clog" ourselves within ourselves? And, since it would require an objective point of view in order to be conceived, a point of view quite disassociated from existents, isn't it contradictory to speak of a world of existents at all?

In a philosophy which gives pride of place to the intensity of reality, is there also a place for the concept of truth, that is, is there a place for the suprapersonal link between existents? Does the concept of intensity exclude the concept of totalness? Does the notion of singularity

¹ *Bulletin de la Société de Philosophie*, Oct.—Dec., 1937: "Objectivity and transcendence."

admit of any form of universality other than something which is just an illusory form of generality? Here we have a modern problem which is, after all, simply a revival of the old argument about universal truths. We have met it several times already in the course of this book. We have seen that it is introduced by the ambivalence of the movement of inwardization; ontologically, it represents the concretion of our projection towards the world; psychologically, it is always inclined towards schizophrenic² introspection. Fear of objective immobility perpetually induces Existentialists to forget this solidarity (which, nevertheless, they all assert) of the towards-the-within and of the towards-the-outward. Now, it is quite apparent to us that, on the basis of Sartre's limited evidence, if every objective constituent is excluded from authentic existence, subjectivity is inevitably drained of its being.

Existentialism oscillates between two poles. At the Kierkegaardian pole (which, it must be remembered, is based on sheer romanticism), mistrust of objectivity is the strongest element. At the other extreme, Phenomenologists, and those who have come under their influence, have tried to link the theory of existence with the theory of being, with the object of preserving authenticity and truth on equal terms.

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IN the process of thinking, there are phenomena of intensification, just the same as those characteristic of organic processes. Kierkegaard's outlook was obscured by the objectivism of Hegel and is characterized by the fact that it deals exclusively with Hegel. According to Kierkegaard, "objectivity" was never capable of producing a movement which could lay hold of Existentialism at the source of its gushing-forth in order to direct its flow towards universality; he never thought of objectivity except in terms of display, or as an institution which stifles existence itself. Whenever he thinks of objectivity, he thinks of systematization, and of there being behind the systematization the idea of spiritual immobilization of certitude, and, therefore, the idea that real truth means truth which has been learned or memorized—a corpse-like object. Such an attitude is understandable in Kierkegaard whose religious viewpoint always takes precedence over his philosophical criticism. We find in Descartes this same worry about truth which has lost the sustaining force of current application and which no longer represents anything else but a form of infatuation, or an untenable concept. We are now in a position to understand this statement in *Post Scriptum*: "Truth

² SCHIZOPHRENIC: (from "schizo-": split, torn, divided; and "phrenic," concerning the heart or the mind). Split-minded.—E.B.

is not truth; it is the path it treads which constitutes truth, that is to say, truth is something that is to become something; it is something that lies within the *processus* of mental absorption, and which, in consequence, cannot be expressed as a development."³ Truth does not gain its basis from any sort of extrinsic coherence (the mark of systematization), but from the faith which has been granted to its objective incertitude. In contradistinction to common opinion, this incertitude is the signal which heralds the advent of truth. "When you have objective incertitude taken over authoritatively by the most impassioned form of inwardness, then, lo, you have truth!"⁴ It is in the very nature of any form of truth which is destined for any existent that it must be received through faith and not through certitude; certitude would eliminate risk and emotion; it could never unfold a state of freedom to any particular life—it could only discover another object to be included in the catalogue. Far from being discredited because of its subjectivity, any conviction which we hold becomes a human conviction simply and solely because of its subjectivity.

We can observe the extremely powerful degree of intuition which is included in this attitude towards the idea of truth. Nevertheless, there is no hiding the fact that there is scarcely any need to constrain the idea of truth in order to absorb it. Moreover, this could be done in another way—by eliminating the subjective antipathy to judging truth. In one part of the particular passage we are thinking of, Kierkegaard emphasizes the supreme importance he attaches, as far as the act of adhesion is concerned, to the *how* (one does adhere) to the *what* (is received). We cannot go right to the end of the road to which we are thus committed, but it is certain that this route leads us to the conviction that there is a certain amount of indifference to the actual content of truth and a corresponding interest in what might be called its power of effervescence. We are aware, of course, that this effervescence is not a sign of quality in truth, but adoption of such an attitude would undoubtedly mean a return to systematization rather than a complete reaction in favour of systematization; Kierkegaard's campaign against systematization insures that the reaction is kept at the level we have indicated.

Nevertheless, to hand truth over just as completely to subjective fervour would, of itself, involve the risk of blocking the lines of communication, and without these lines of communication it would be impossible to discuss the idea of truth at all. We have already described this "temptation of the incommunicable" which affects Kierkegaard.

³ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

The "subjective thinker" is the thinker of secret things. Like Socrates, he would even prefer to be not understood; he thus suppresses the inevitable misunderstanding. Moreover, his own particular method of expression lies not in discussion but in paradox—in open, free and objective discussion. Paradox is the spark which springs from the friction between eternal truth and the use of words. Although it is the result of this indescribable shock, it is, nevertheless, at the mercy of verbal expression, and verbal expression is the means of provoking objective uncertainty in an atmosphere of subjective emotion.⁵ It is not that eternal truth *is*, in itself, a paradox, but it always is so in its relation to an existent. In the course of history, paradox has assumed different names: It was called Socratic Ignorance; it inspired the *credo quia absurdum*. Nobody will ever be able to devise a system of logic for it; it can only be justified paradoxically. The only explanation you can give of paradox is that it involves grasping ever more firmly the idea of what paradox is, and of being able to decide that such and such a paradox is a paradox. It is for this reason that Christianity, which represents ultimate truth, does not want to be understood. All it asks is the realization that it does not want to be understood. It is better to be a man who is indignant at the idea of Christianity and is thereby put into direct and profound contact with it, than to be a mere "speculator" in Christianity who claims to "understand" it. Truth may be an attractive thing, but it always exercises its attraction by means of other charms than the invisible beauties of truth. Socrates' very ugliness had a philosophic value—it guaranteed the authenticity of his influence.⁶

But no logical form of Nihilism can be kept up right to the end. When he has forced the paradox to its point, we always find Kierkegaard expressing in one corner of the page the ontological remorse of the philosopher. It is for this reason that he never tries, as present-day Irrationalism does, to hide the world of shadows and opaqueness. Inwardness is itself its own intelligible light, just as it is for St. Augustine. "The transparency of the philosophy of existence is created precisely by inwardness."⁷ If, "in a general way, emotion and reflexion are excluded,"⁸ the man of faith always retains a deep respect for reason. He will exercise it in everything that is available to average humanity, in order to understand the attitudes and objections of another-person. Although he may be opposed to the use of reason in his relations with

⁵ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142, *et seq.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

Christianity, he, nevertheless, exercises reason continuously in his outward relations with the basic Relationship with the Absolute. He does this even if only to make his attitude clear and to draw attention to the fact that he does oppose it.⁹ In the end, it is fundamentally impossible for any religious philosophy, within which the very life of subjectivity is received and unfolded *in the sight of God*, ever to be completely absorbed into subjectivity. Duhem showed how, throughout the history of the sciences, not only the concept of an Absolute Being but also the concept of one indivisible World has been evolved within and by means of a religious atmosphere. We find in Jaspers the same over-extended dialectic allied to a breaking-force which has been strengthened by more elaborate philosophical means; we also note the same halt on the verge of breaking point. At the start, the dislocation of being seems irremediable. There is a state of incompatibility between universality and existence. The whole of unitary ontology presupposes a totalness in existents. Now, existence, as such, is irreducible, spontaneous and ineffable. Ideas can have no hold over it; neither can laws nor social intercourse. Human individuals cannot be units of a totalizing unity. Thus, there can be no form of truth applicable to everything, no form of truth applicable to everybody; nor, outside the realms of history, can there be any form of truth which is applicable to every moment of time. The philosophy of existence can throw light only upon individual *cases*; it can only describe *discontinuous situations*. And, moreover, such investigations can never cover a wider field of existence than that in which they have been made. Philosophy must reject the notion of its being extended over a wide field (a temptation which is offered by the traditional idea of truth), and must limit itself to a narrow and highly specialized field; it must reject the notion of organization in favour of the notion of investigation. Thus, philosophy can never lead me to discover *the* truth; it can only lead me to discover *my own* truth which applies to me, an existent, in my search for the meaning of existence by means of investigation of my own existence. I cannot escape this form of truth; I cannot master it from outside, in order to compare it with other forms. Although, in my innermost self, I am freed by it, I nevertheless remain encircled by it; it is truth, an awakening and a way of living for me alone and for no one else. It is not that it clamps me down upon myself; it also cries out to the other-person; it provokes an echo. *De profundis clamavi ad te*.¹⁰ It is not an exposition (and here, again, we find, in

⁹ *Post-Scriptum*, p. 382, *et seq.*

¹⁰ Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee.—from *Psalms*.

opposition to the Hegelian notion of publicness, the notion of modesty and with it the notion of appeal); it is an invocation. This invocation can bowl over another existent and awaken in him the realization of *his* truth which may perhaps harmonize with mine, but which can never be communicated to me; it does not act along the extrinsic lines of demonstration or persuasion. There is no direct transmission, but there is a sort of induction of thought at a distance. All effort to escape from this state of spiritual life is a flight on the part of existential disquietude towards mortification of the mind; it is the form of temptation offered by Parmenides and Kant, and by Nicholas de Cuse and Spinoza. Thus, as far as this first point of view is concerned, there can be no generalized form of existence and no generalized form of truth; there can only be *these* concrete existents we see before us. Every expression of existence deriving from the ineffable state is, therefore, ambiguous and misleading. Once he has grasped this fundamental truth, the existent abandons his passion for knowledge—the exhausting pursuit of shadows and expressive shadows—in favour of the sustaining passion of *non-knowledge*; he forsakes the philosophy of *day-time* for the philosophy of *night-time*. Self-expression, which Kierkegaard, the artist and virtuoso of words, had concentrated in the paradox, Jaspers, the philosopher, concentrates in *figures*. As far as he is concerned, the only way to describe his notion of the transcendence from life to existence would be to call it an undecipherable sort of arithmetic. It cannot convey to him an abstract content in any intelligible form as a concept can; it can do it only by a sort of irrational sign (the Pascalian “sign,” meaning paradox—the same thing as a figure) which offers freedom a revelation not expressible in words. Such a revelation is at once superabundant and fallacious. It communicates itself only by means of equivocations and antinomies. In the intense darkness of non-understanding, freedom alone can reach it.

Here we are, then, seemingly shut up in a prison which is even gloomier than Kierkegaard’s inwardness, which was, at least, ceaselessly illuminated by the beam of his own light.

But the account we have just examined would itself be an explanation and a system, were it not that it is fitted into a relationship of tension and an irresolvable ambivalence with a second aspect of things. On the one hand, existence endures; it triumphs over time only by means of repetition; yet, as soon as there is repetition, there is the beginning of generalization; as soon as generalization creeps in, systematization begins. Any experience which consisted only of absolute oneness could no longer

exist, because any experience which could not be repeated would negative that communication from oneself to oneself, and that presence of oneself before oneself, which constitute Existential experience. Thus, systematization, or, more generally, objectivity, although distressing, is really necessary for the life of the mind in order to assist its tension, and in order for it to triumph by denying it. The more we proceed through Jaspers' works, the more we are aware of this heroic effort of the existent to prevent the disintegration of existence. We must remember, of course, that the existent cannot see his being face to face, but he can, after a fashion, have some idea of it; he can throw some light on it by means of a marginal perspective. What does the effort involved in transcendence¹¹ amount to unless it represents the fruitless but not empty effort to break the bonds of a jaded existence? And, if it is not an empty effort, is not this fact evidence that a force of reconciliation is at work on the Diaspora of Being, and that the ineffable state does not represent the last word, nor impotence the last possibility, concerning it?

Thus, the Jasperian solitude, if it is not explicitly (as the Kierkegaardian oneness is) an *in-the-sight-of-God* state, is, nevertheless, an *in-the-sight-of-another-person* state, as far as invocation is concerned, and an *in-the-sight-of-Being* state, as far as transcendence is concerned. It is a form of "in-the-sight-of" state which never entirely detaches itself, but which is there, a *there-in-the-sight-of* state. If there were no structure between the appellant and the one who is summoned, how could there be any response? How, for instance, could the individual, Jaspers, devise a philosophy of existence (even granting the non-generality of existence) instead of merely talking to himself, since he himself is an existent? This is what he himself quite realized. A philosophy which is concerned with the human state is always to some extent a philosophy which is concerned with spirituality. But, instead of a continuous spirituality, instead of a sort of ontological manna scattered over the totalness of existents, Jaspers sees the intimate unity of existents as a kind of rattling of a chain of appeals and responses, as a series of enthusiasms and freedoms working in with each other and daring each other in their common effort to attain transcendence. Another-person does not always represent nothingness and hostility towards another-person, or, at least, he does not, in so far as elementary dispersion of indifference and conflict are concerned. Another-person represents a presence and an appeal; another-person is *similar*, while, at the same time, remaining unalterably

¹¹ Sometimes Jaspers calls transcendence "the particular-general" (*Einzig-allgemein*).

another-person in the unfortunate state in which we find ourselves. But if it is *intercourse* (which, by turns, takes the form of combat and spiritual communion) which constitutes existence, as Jaspers claims, then there can no longer be as many forms of truth as there are existents. In order to achieve the state of being, existence must not only be, but it must also appear. Existence itself is simultaneously within and without; it represents intention at the same time as it represents intensity. From this point on there can no longer be any original sin of objectivity. "It is through philosophy that objectivity is *called in question*. But the danger in such a form of reflexion is that it dissolves all content . . . and is left stranded in Nihilism. The aim of philosophy is to get a *fresh* grip on objectivity and so make it the means of causing existence to appear." There is no longer any need to speak of the death of objectivity, except in the sense in which Unamuno¹² evoked the anguish of Christianity, in the sense of the anguish of objectivity, in the sense of a passionate, necessary, unfortunate, but, nevertheless, transforming struggle, in the sense of being which is accompanied by its own manifestation.

We realize how vigorously Heidegger proclaims the difference between his *ultra-Existential* philosophy and the Existential philosophy of Kierkegaard and Jaspers. These two, he asserts (and we now know at what price of simplification he does assert it), are acquainted only with individual and incommunicable existents. He never stops proclaiming (as they do) that, on the contrary, his ultimate aim is to elucidate the meaning of being in general, a claim which is challenged by Jaspers. He has, however, to abandon the notion of the experience which the existent can have of it. Now, in Heidegger's world, the existent can have no form of being which can be recognized opposite oneself. He recognizes being within his own being, the *Dasein*, at the same time as he is confirmed in the idea of the projection of his potentialities. The *Dasein* simultaneously represents *this* concrete form of being and being in general. It does not so much evolve a form of truth for us as reveal to us, through certain peculiarities, a form of absolute. There can be no form of truth except that which is unfolded. Nevertheless, to the extent to which the structure of all forms of *Dasein* is identical, one can speak of universal truth. As a matter of fact, we have great difficulty in understanding how such an identification can have any

¹² UNAMUNO, Miguel de: Spanish professor of Philosophy and Classics, b. Bilbao, 1864. Exiled by Primo de Rivera regime, 1923. Became writer in Paris. A mystic poet and novelist. Advocate of Quixotism as an ideal. Engl. translations include: *Essays and Soliloquies* (1925), *Agony of Christianity* (1928), and a novel, *Mist* (1929).—E.B.

basis of fact within a philosophy which is superior to Psychological Subjectivism. Psychological Subjectivism is a form of philosophy which includes all forms of truth within the individual. We can only associate such an identification with an ontological form of Subjectivism, one in which the *Dasein* which is actually experienced is regarded as the Revealer of its own revelation and of that alone; the question of transcendence is not involved, and there is no question of us being, with any certainty, able to discern what, within its range of manifestation, depends on being in the singular, and what depends on the human being in general. The same untenable argument is to be found in Sartre's works; "In making his choice (man) chooses all men . . . It is not one of our acts which, by creating the man we should like to be, creates, at the same time a picture of man as we fondly imagine he ought to be . . . Nothing can be good for us without being good for everyone."¹³ In a philosophy which completely rejects the idea of any form of human nature, such assertions as these, which are put forward with nothing to back them up, seem quite arbitrary. It is true that several pages further on Sartre re-establishes a certain universality of the human state, a state which is not logically established, but which is in a perpetual process of being formed in the mind, a state which every man can create through the projects of every other man. In so far as he asserts, in opposition to a static conception of man, that men progressively make up humanity by a largely unpredictable effort, we can follow him. But yet again, if the notes of a scale and the general lines of a harmony, which, in other circumstances, lend themselves to the most miraculous combinations, were presented to them in the order of their values, then their improvisations, which would really amount to inventions of some sort or other in which all possible forms of humanity were included, would challenge every effort to judge them or control them, on the ground that it was an unfounded, ridiculous and arbitrary claim.

Whether or not it succeeds, it would thus seem that every form of Existentialism is inwardly beset by worry about reconciling existence to truth. The real achievement for Existentialism will be when it has ultimately discredited this way of presenting spirituality as an object so abstract that the spirituality which does not exist seems to present the same kind of properties as the spirituality which does exist, and when existence is no longer considered only as an ordinary complement contingent upon spirituality. Existential criticism would like to accustom us to believing that, on the contrary, all real spirituality is the result of

¹³ *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 25.

an act, and that, therefore, it is spirituality which is the complement of existence, instead of the other way round.¹⁴ Once spirituality is thus revitalized and re-Existentialized, there no longer is, between itself and existence, this deadly form of suppression which would insist upon the assertion of the notion of existence against all reason, in the absolute darkness ("the black fountain" of Jaspers, and "the flat dough" of Sartre) of being in its crude state. Through the influence of man, existence is already petrified by rational being. In the one movement, it carries us through a painful series of dialectics towards truth and towards intensity.

There is still the fact that, owing to the reverses suffered by existence and reason, an existent never comprehends *the truth*; all he comprehends is a few truths, and very imperfectly at that. He is not confined to the same extent within the plain glorification of his existence. If he is not seeking truth-in-general, a form of truth which would not be personal truth, then, from the moment of his resurgence, he is linked with a *spirit of truth*¹⁵ which leads him to break down self-satisfaction and to pursue, beyond his crude experience, real universality—an indissoluble union of Life and Truth. The horizon of truth which he thus reveals, and which grows wider and ever wider as he detaches himself more and more from himself, is not an impersonal environment in which the existent of a subjective turn of mind would become, as is claimed, an "objective" thinker. It is a suprapersonal state, and he remains in a personal relationship with it which produces a sort of loyalism.¹⁶

But the paths which lead to this alliance are mostly crooked ones and the few dead-straight ones rarely lead to the goal. The Existential method of approach to truth can only be a dialectical one, a disconnected and subtle approach. Sometimes it will have to accept the dark tunnels of non-understanding; sometimes it will have to play on the ascetic value of negation; sometimes it will have to silence all forms of expression should it find that the most innocent of words are poisonous and the freest of words are, all unbeknown to us, entangled with others; sometimes it will have to play on the theme of alternation and shock everyone in order to hew out a direct path. "If he is extolled, I humiliate him; if he is humiliated, I extol him and continually contradict him until he understands that he is an incomprehensible monster."¹⁷

This new form of logic is still only in fragmentary form. It would be a glorious task to build it up.

¹⁴ Cf. E. Gilson, in *l'Existence*, Ed. Gallimard, 1946.

¹⁵ Gabriel Marcel: *Homo Viator*, p. 135.

¹⁶ Royce, quoted by G. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, p. 217—218.

¹⁷ Pascal: *Pensées*, p. 420.

VIII

THE KINGDOM OF BEING IS IN OUR MIDST

EVER since Nietzsche's day, modern philosophy has been haunted by the phobia of the "back-of-beyond" world. It conjures up visions of the nocturnal prowler who dreads his own shadow more than the silence which surrounds him; my disquieting shadow, another-person who is not another-person, a stranger who has sprung from me and is attached to me, a state of nothingness that does not let me go and which haunts me more than I do myself.

The thinking man of the twentieth century himself also seems to be more afraid of meeting his shadow in the universe than of finding absolute solitude in it. Sometimes this fear becomes hallucinating. Every other presence we encounter in the course of our experience is denounced as a mere projection of ourselves, a double of ourselves (or as something which is under the influence of our presence) which is pictured in our imagination in order to create the impression that the doubtful solidity of our universe is firmer than it is.

I should like to suggest to M. Sartre that he apply Existential psycho-analysis to this "phobia of the Double," because it does not seem to be absent from the opening pages of *Being and Nothingness*. Classical psycho-analysis is concerned precisely with this, and has discovered that, within this fear of our Double, there is the petrified anguish of our own abysmal state. Or, to express it more clearly, this fear seems to indicate, in an ambivalent way, that the evidence (which daily becomes more concrete) concerning the world need not obliterate the meaning of our presence nor our scrupulousness against basely reducing this world of ours to our own standards. But mere denunciation of an optical illusion is not sufficient to reveal its cause. We still want to know if the "illusion of 'The Looking-Glass World'" does not presuppose, because of its generality (which is ill-adapted to make allowance for particular cases) a form of intuition, which is difficult to express and which is really nothing but an imperfect reflexion from the Glass.

This fear of laying oneself open to such an illusion proceeds, by means

of a sort of supercompensation, to corrode right through to this presence-of-being-belonging-to-oneself, right through to this form of living repetition, and right through to that ample reservoir which constitutes the immediate experience of being. As far as its most intimate life is concerned, being certainly makes us think of Looking-Glass being, of a sort of ontological denseness. But it is not a distorted projection on to an abstract screen of complete being. Through its superabundance and its perseverance, it reveals a vigorous source of being. The project of the Looking-Glass World is, of course, a primary project, and one which gives opportunity for thinking. But here, as so often, it happens that the imperfect grasp of a badly detached truth is more valuable than aberrations which have, for so long, been regarded as abstractions. In criticising the project of the Looking-Glass World, we have gone to the extreme of denying being itself—that form of being which gushes forth from being, as well as the movement which impels it to make it gush forth out of nothingness.

Sartre's particular form of nothingness is undoubtedly an advance upon his predecessors' notions. Up to now, when you talked about the sovereignty of nothingness, you meant by nothingness a sort of object, a sort of negative universe—you used the word in the sense implied when nothingness is humorously referred to as the substance of things. There is little difficulty in showing that what was still meant by the term "substance," which is now denied, was, literally, a form of substance whose content of nothingness could only be established through some kind of insincerity and playing about with words which permitted the being of what they designated to be simultaneously affirmed and denied. To this shadowy form of substantialism Sartre has applied the classical criticism of a clearly-defined form of substantialism, and so connected the philosophy of nothingness with the dialectic again. Nothingness does not *be*; it is created by an absence of something; it persistently thrusts before its own absence the state of flight from a form of detotalization which has never been totalized—the term "nothingized" is still too strong an expression to use. We must, therefore, fall back on those horrible neutral expressions which Psycho-analysis has successfully used to denote a world from which all basis of personality has been excluded. "That nothingizes on all sides." That actually nothingizes much more than even Sartre's vocabulary claims, for, as we shall see, in no way does he retain the right to speak of being.

What, exactly, is this concept of being?

When I put myself in front of being as an observer, what is, is

whatever I cannot entirely dispose of, whatever is, as far as I am concerned, at least partly, a revelation of experience. Looked at from the inward point of view, it is what survives; it is not only the identification of self with self, which is a sort of paraded non-existence, but it also represents superabundance and leaping-forth—in a word, it represents creative accomplishment. To accept the idea of being, is, then, to accept the proposition that there is in front of me someone else besides myself, and that, in being, there is some other sort of being than the actual being which is present. By adopting such an attitude we gain a positive ability for mobility: accomplishment, which is not actually present and which is motivated by its intimate superabundance. The idea of creative accomplishment occupies a central place in ontology. It expresses simultaneously the abundance and the poverty which characterize our experience of being.

Sartre has anticipated this dialectic of accomplishment and inward mobility in being. But he breaks it up into two parts. He sets them up opposite each other like two stumps of incommunicable being, though, quite erroneously, he retains the name being for each of them. On the one side, in "being-in-oneself," he petrifies accomplishment into mere-massiveness. Such a form of immobilization is fatal from the moment when he denies being any inward dimension of spontaneity, and denies it all depth of content. Being "is unveiled just as it is." There is no power; everything depends on manifestation. If it is the case that being is apparently disrobed by our grasp and that it is continuously fleeing towards a state of infinity of revelation, then it does not do so within the recesses of itself, but laterally. It is its revelations which are inexhaustible, not its being. A more attractive form of Positivism is thus substituted for the sordid Positivism of our fathers, but, all the same, we still remain in a state of Positivist ontology—that is, provided these two words can be used together. Being enjoys no form of inward life, no form of reflexion which has been thought out by means of its reflexion, no form of enlightenment derived from enlightenment, no consciousness of itself, no pulsation with immanence; it is opaque to itself for the very reason that it is filled with itself. It is huge and stupid; it is isolated from its being and maintains no contact with what is not itself; it represents absolute positiveness; it is not reserved; it is unusual and insolent—it is, in fact, "quite out of place."¹

I don't know whether the untenability of this description has been sufficiently emphasized. It comes back to defining being as one aspect

¹ *L'Être et le Néant*, pp. 11, 13, 33.

of the object and to a complete identification of oneself with oneself. Here, the ornate psycho-sensory phraseology of Sartre creates an illusion. It tends to convert appearance of solidity into a description which really becomes logical sameness, that is to say, in so far as existence represents indifference, survival and superabundance, it tends to convert it into a description of non-existence.

Having thus drained off spontaneity, inwardness and accomplishment from being, Sartre can in no way concede that these factors have any being, since, as far as he is concerned, being *a priori* represents immobility. Any form of spontaneity which *could be* "would automatically be soaked up by a form of in-oneness."² Inwardness can only be "central absence."³ Those who have visited factories where perfume is extracted from flowers have described to us what a sickening feeling the delicate rose scent can produce when it reaches a certain density. By a sort of preliminary ontological chemistry, Sartre first of all creates in his mind a picture of being which is saturated to the point of nausea, and, having done this, he goes out into the wide open spaces for a breath of fresh air. If accomplishment can represent nothing *but* massiveness, then the movement of being, a direct result of experience, can only represent nothingness, that is, an infiltration of nothingness into being which is sufficient to give it an acceptable degree of density. As far as Existentialist psycho-analysis is concerned, such seems to be the basic derivation of Sartre's for-oneness which represents the other stump of being. But nothingness is not a source of power; it cannot give the for-oneness mobility and propulsive force. Propulsive force can no longer come to it from the stupid immobility of the in-oneness. Thus, it can only represent a fall (or, if you prefer not to use a term which has too much moral implication) it represents a flight of the for-oneness in face of the in-oneness. Sartre would call it a flight in face of clogging.⁴ And, once more, we encounter in his works, in reference to the relationship of the human being to otherness, that particular sensibility to appropriation, that special intolerance of ontological contact, that degeneration of the state of *encounter* into mere *adhesiveness*. In fact, this notion of adhesiveness certainly seems to be the most constantly-recurring project in his particular view of the world. Another-person can, perhaps, be represented by the Looking-Glass "me" as well as by the Looking-Glass World. According to Sartre, being glued to another-person, and being glued to oneself are the two permanent ontological dangers. He has arranged being which

² *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 195

³ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193

confronts man in such a way that it has nothing to offer man except an avidity for snapping him up and reabsorbing him into his stupidity. Man's being can do no more than flee from it in horror. This almost hallucinating caricature of the makeup of the in-oneself state seems to betray a sort of ontological tit-for-tat attitude, the meaning of which is presented to us by Sartre himself in his analysis of Sadism.

We must remember that the Sadist is the man who is unable to possess another-person within the bounds of another-person's freedom, and, consequently, furiously sets to work to reduce him to an object, in order to deprive him of that freedom which he, the Sadist, lacks. What seems to happen is that, having only offered existence a desire for possession and having found no means of attaining it, because it wants to be summoned and loved, not appropriated, the Sartrian man directs against it the resentment arising from his ontological disappointment. He does this by presenting himself to it thereafter as something which is intolerably stupid as far as the human being is concerned. The devaluation of being-in-oneself is the form of revenge which is indulged in by the disappointed possessor. Sartre has, moreover, not concealed from himself the fact that inability to possess arouses the desire to destroy, and he even analyses the emotion of generosity down to a form of accelerated destruction. Then the Sartrian man projects his own avidity into this devaluated and inaccessible form of being.

We observe that Sartre never entirely abandons classical ontology. He could, as Vitalism and Subjectivism do, bring back into the vitalized subject all the reality of being. The fact that he supports the notion of an in-oneself which is not man, and the fact that he refuses to concede any positive form of existence to the human being in order to vitalize him with nothingness, imply that he does admit that there is in being an indestructible element of consciousness resulting from experience. But, because he does not want this consciousness resulting from experience to be for man a received form of consciousness resulting from experience, or a form that has been agreed to, he constitutes it with regard to man in such a heteronomical form that man cannot but be overwhelmed and menaced by it. If this comment on his analysis is worth anything, then, henceforward, it insists on a novel form of rejection of living being.

Such a form of philosophy unequivocally clears an atmosphere which has been befogged by a hundred years of compromise. Faithful to the Existentialist spirit, it obliges us to make the decisive choice. Contemporary forms of Positivism and Materialism, philosophies of indecision and quasi-comfort, half-Materialist, half-Idealist, which try

to establish themselves in between an attitude of rejection of classical ontology and an attitude of support for a vague kind of existence may, nevertheless, still influence works of science and the hoary old games of philosophy. Such an attitude has proved itself to be untenable. At the beginning of all philosophy and of all forms of existence that are postulated, there stands the fundamental ontological decision: Either I accept being as what it claims to be (and it claims to be something which has to be discovered and accompanied through life, not an object to be possessed), in which case, I am then swept up by its impetus into a real form of transcendence of which I am neither the servant nor the master. (This is what the old types of dialectic, such as the ontological proof, or proof through the notion of perfection, express in their own particular ways). Or else I reject the notion of being because of a fundamental preconceived opinion identical with ontological acceptance. Moreover, this rejection itself carries me on, provided it is clearly and decisively led, towards an ontology of nothingness similar to Sartre's. Sartre's philosophy may be summed up as a neo-ontological proof, a proof of nothingness through disgust with perfection, a proof in which Nausea, which represents revulsion against being, plays the same part as, at the opposite extreme (for Pascal, for instance) is played by the "movement to continue to go farther," the internal movement of the form of transcendence which constitutes Being.

It is not that an ontology of accomplishment represents exclusively an assertion of nothingness. Christian ontology is sufficient proof of this. As far as Christian ontology is concerned, the fundamental nothingness of the creature also haunts (to use Sartre's favourite expression) the being of creation. But it haunts it *within* its being; it is not constitutive *of* its being. It penetrates right into the fibre, right into the tissue of our being, just as poison works its way into our remotest cells. If we heed the voices of the greatest mystics, there is not even a path towards absolute Being, which includes a preliminary assumption of this presence of Nothingness, within the darkness of the flesh and the mind. But it is only experience resulting from accomplishment which can lead to nothingness, because its motive force is not nothingness but consciousness of Nothingness—which is tacit realisation of the Absolute.

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EVERY avenue of our analysis leads us to determine precisely the meaning of this notion of transcendence which is so important in all forms of Existentialism, but which has such fundamentally heterogeneous meanings for all of them.

To transcend means to extend by means of a movement. The verb, "to transcend", is more expressive than the noun derived from it, and when the noun is used, it should be used as a substantive of action⁵ rather than a substantive indicating state. An objectivating type of thinking always has a tendency to imagine transcendence as something presented to the mind, an elevated state, which may be supposed to follow the simplified outline of superimposed plans. Such a supposition involves us in gross misconceptions within the realm of vocabulary. If transcendence were only a state outside our reach, how could we regard it as an inward movement? Our existence is like an act which we are implored to perform. If to transcend meant nothing more than "to be infinitely higher than," how could God, who represents the perfect Transcendent, be said to be at the same time more intimately connected with me than I am with myself?

Existentialists, in general, have revived every aspect of this notion of transcendence. They have so expertly softened it down that, more than once, it has been liable to become completely inconsistent as the result. Wahl has observed that, in Heidegger's works, the term transcendence can mean:

- (I) transcendence of existence over nothingness;
- (II) transcendence of the existent in respect of the world;
- (III) transcendence of the world in relation to the existent, and
- (IV) transcendence of the existent in relation to himself by means of the movement in which he is projected in advance of himself towards the future.

Such an eclectic⁶ form of "transcendence" as this reveals all sorts of conflicting notions. It clings to the idea of accomplishment, of movement and to the idea of outwardness and of domination. There is the same multiple ambivalence in the Sartrean theory, which Sartre closely connects with Heidegger's "shattering of being." It is a theory which is destined to replace the old theory of substance, and which is conceived as a form of perseverance of being displayed within its being.

To-day, we must throw some light on this usage which has become inconsistent. We shall pick out three incompatible theories:

I. The static theory of *cutting* or ontological *cracking* which Sartre,

⁵ In *Five Lectures on Existence*, Berdyaev suggests the word "transcending" ("transcendement") instead of "transcendence." But such a suggestion shows that Berdyaev has not sufficient grasp of French nuances—the word "transcendence" quite adequately expresses the idea of movement.

⁶ "Eclectic"—picking out, selecting. Belonging to an ancient school of philosophers who selected the doctrines which suited them from various systems. Not following a single school or authority exclusively.—E.B.

under different names, often uses with effect. There is, for instance, an ontological crack between two ways of existence which are intimately mingled, like Good and Evil are, into a certain sameness of conduct, or, like Truth and Lying, into insincerity and, like being and nothingness, into human existence.

II. The tentative theory of *project* (or if the term we suggested earlier is adopted, the theory of *transprocendence*). As far as Sartre and Heidegger are concerned, this theory represents the transcendence of the human being who is perpetually thrust in advance of himself without being raised in the same degree to a superior way of living or to a more perfect degree of accomplishment. Here, in fact, it is not a question of an articulated and projective form of immanence, since, in the end, it is towards himself that the existent is projected.

III. Finally transcendence, rightly so-called (what Jean Wahl calls *transcendence*), which lies in the midst of existence, the experience of an infinite, or, at least, of an indefinite movement towards a state of super-being, a movement so clearly inherent in being that it either accepts itself along with the movement or else it rejects itself and the movement too.

Confusion arising from the use of words, which we thus try to limit, comes partly from that experience of authentic transcendence (which is a form of conquest suggested to our freedom) which always presents itself whenever there is a state of ambivalence. The freedom of man cannot, in fact, be exercised except through decision, and, in order to be a true *saltus*⁷ of existence, decision requires that truth should be presented to it as an enigma, and that action should be presented to it as a form of imbroglia.

The first two kinds of "transcendence" are notions common to all forms of Existentialism. In contradistinction to totalizing philosophies, like those of Spinoza or Leibniz or Hegel, Nature represents for Existentialism, by very definition, that which makes leaps from one Order to the other (Pascalian version), or from one spiritual plane to the next (Kierkegaardian version), or from one shattering to another shattering of the shattered world (Jaspers' version), or from one mode of being to the other (the version of Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre). They are all equally imbued with the same acute sense of the prospective mobility of the human being. But, rightly-speaking, transcendence (in sense III) is found only in one of the two Existential branches which we have

⁷ Leap

singled out, the branch which upholds Christian Existentialism and the theories of Jaspers.

By its eruptive power, this inward transcendence to the state of being distracts the natural harmonies of man. Moreover, there are two ways of approaching it.

The first, and less frequent, is the happy route. In this case, the transcendent human is directly snatched, like a new-born state of accomplishment and a dimly-glimpsed glory of being, into the general experience of *overextension*. Such an experience is a lone type of experience. It implies a recognition of being,⁸ and the acceptance of the notion of a liberating force in place of the obsession about appropriation which haunts Sartre's ontology.

This is the simplest form of experience of the inexhaustibility of being. We have already heard Gabriel Marcel refer to existence as non-classifiable. Modesty says: "My body is something more than my body." Timidity says: "I am something more than my gestures and my statements indicate." Irony says: "There is much more in an idea than there seems at first sight." And Lust expresses the opinion that the hands of man are not powerful enough to grasp the erotic splendour of life. This inexhaustibility, Sartre would claim, is a horizontal form of inexhaustibility; it explains the infinity of the relations of the existent; it is not a sort of rich store. Now, this is mere playing about with words. Imaginary outlines of schemes in which I project my experience of inexhaustibility matter little. What does matter is the amount of reality which it contains. It is such that the undiscovered wealth of being, instead of diminishing with the number of my grasps, seems to me even more inexhaustible than my investigation has shown it to be.

Very closely connected with this initial form of experience is the experience of *irruption*. I cannot contain my existence within me. Whenever I am subject to a sensation, my thinking faculty is already brooding and planning; in my thinking faculty there is something more than my thinking faculty; in my desired will, dull sorts of desiring wills which carry me beyond my consciously desired goals, and sometimes they carry me in the inverse direction. It is upon such a type of experience as this that the dialectic of a man like Maurice Blondel is based; his is an immanence system which leads to a detachment from transcendence. Enthusiasm is the affective aspect of this ontological experience.

⁸ This is a Platonic reference, and a reference to St. Augustine, and it also reminds us of Pascal's "Thou wouldst not have sought me, hadst thou already found me," and of Kierkegaard's notion of "in the sight of God."

If the emphasis is placed less on the effervescence from this form of inward super-being than on the inevitable character of its claim, that is, on the way in which it predicts our own present state, then it will represent the description of an experience of *presence*, and, correlatively, an experience of *attestation*. We have met such a type of description several times in the works of Gabriel Marcel. My being does not represent my life. It represents a constant state of disappropriation of the "me—I," something which is inspired by whatever within me causes me to fly into a rage with myself (when this rage reaches the stage of white heat, it represents the experience of admiration). It represents a recourse to a form of being which is better than my empirical state of being, and better than my present state of being or my individual state of being. It is here that the experiences of fidelity, pardon and loyalism, are brought into play which are, at once, the negation of the autonomy of solipsism and of heteronomy, a state in which some people believe the relationships of transcendence can be debased. My being is not only thrust into a state of abandonment, just as if it had been "thrown there," but it is also conceived as having been *put there* and forewarned into the experience of recourse to or nostalgia for the factor of pardon.

But, perhaps, being may be conceived as superabounding within forms of experience other than the direct experience of accomplishment. Let us recall the important position which the miseries arising from pangs of conscience occupy in Existentialist tradition. Experience of accomplishment cannot be anything else but a rare kind of grace which appears during the course of a miserable existence. The encounter with transcendence is more often produced in negative ways, and no longer by means of over extension, but it is produced right beyond the bounds.

Instead of revealing itself as *inexhaustible*, it is then revealed as *irreducible*. This is what Kierkegaard means by the shock of existence. In this world, I am not bathed in the reassuring light of eternity; I hurl myself against eternity just as if I were hurling myself against an absolute form of Other-Person who is irritating because of his otherness, who is hostile to my own projects, who is injurious to my reason and who adopts an intractable attitude towards my slothfulness. Shock represents simultaneously rejection and revelation. Any form of experience which were unfolded in a finite and unclassifiable world would end by fading out on its own borders, just like water on the seashore, and it would fade out without any expression of anguish, without any excessive desires and without any elaborate plans. This borderline which is so roughly

hurled into all the dimensions of existence presupposes the notion of a super-world without its being actually discovered. It is itself, like the experience of the inexhaustible, a positive experience. It is what appears so clearly in Jaspers' philosophy. Borderline situations are situations which I stumble on without being able to master them. They are thus presented in a negative guise. In our own particular state, we cannot see over or behind the demand they make upon us; they are walls which we come up against. But, at the same time, they put me into contact with one obscure meaning of the world which cannot be an object of consciousness, even though it may be apprehended, even when we are in a state of reversal, as, for instance, when we are suffering a reverse in order that we may be transformed. In this hostile neighbourhood which the termination of the borderline represents, there is revealed, like some unassailable area, like some secret presence in the night, like a sort of *Deus absconditus*, the absolute background. The distress caused by decision-making introduces the borderline at every point and at every moment of existence; it creates from experience of the borderline a two-fold form of undetachableness from experience of superabundance. Thus, the borderline, which lies vibrating on the verge of the act, does not call for a halt but for a leap into adventure and into speculation.

On the basis of such experiences as these, a dialectic of negation is developed. Reason is competent wherever reflexion comes up against objects. Existentialism is not, as is sometimes arbitrarily claimed, a form of Irrationalism. It simply does not allow reason so wide a field as many forms of Rationalism do. It merely asserts that reason is not the sole means of becoming aware of existence, and that reason can be so penetrating (why fix *a priori* limits to its powers of penetration?) that, in view of man's state, it cannot be the ultimate means for plumbing the depths of existence. Existence means freedom, and, as such, is not completely rationalizable. When it is faced with reflexion, transcendent being cannot be immobilized into an object. The fundamental relationship between any form of transcendence and any form of freedom cannot, therefore, be based on rational knowledge. Kierkegaard and the Christian Existentialists believe it to have its basis in *faith*, because that is the specific basis on which the existent is aware of existence. Faith is the very opposite of assurance; it can be animated only by tension between itself and whatever denies it; it is vitalized by a permanent effervescence of doubt concerning the nascent state, without which it would not be a free gift of experience. Its special feature is incomprehensibility (as far as Pascal is concerned) and paradox (as far as Kierkegaard is concerned);

St. Paul originally called it enigma. Jaspers has chosen another metaphor: "The world is a manuscript written by somebody else, which is incapable of being read by everyone, and which existence alone is capable of deciphering." The *cipher* is the mediator between transcendence and the existent. It is not intelligible to ordinary understanding for which it represents only the outward or verbal model. Its meaning can be revealed only to concrete existence. I can live for a long time in the only form of existence which is manifested according to the law of Day-time. But, here is what surges up in front of me, some obscure point, an enigma, the barrage arising from despair, the resistance offered by a form of being, the tearing pang arising from a situation in which I find myself, the estrangement arising from a particular event—and, with it, the dull protest against the nature of my ideas, against my reasoning powers, against my life, and against my words. Passion for Night-time overcomes me, a passion for destroying habitude or evidence, a passion for remaining silent in order to let these unusual ciphers deliver their unexpected message. Myths, symbols, religious rites and philosophic systems themselves are all attempts to introduce a certain universality into the universe of ciphers. But they do not prevent the truth of a cipher being in each case to a large extent unique for the existent who discovers it, and from being equivocal for itself and for whoever looks at it. There precisely is the sign of transcendence. Being cannot produce a clear form of truth which is both inexhaustible and communicable.

This nocturnal form of experience differs according to the occasion and to the lives involved. It penetrates certain experiences of boredom, of *taedium vitae*, which represents a relaxation from the degree of intensity which unites us with the superabundance of being.⁹ It may make an offensive excursion into the realm of *defiance*, which represents the time-key of the Jasperian dialectic. Defiance stands on the side of existence in opposition to indifference. It represents an answer to the silence of existence, to its secrecy and to the ambivalence of its messages; it is a way of being which is animated by existence, which offers a means of entering into direct relations with it when, as Kierkegaard pointed out earlier, satisfied certitude separates us from it more surely than negation does. It is like a piece of red-hot iron coming into contact with cold water. If there were no such thing as defiance, there could no longer be any such thing as consent, either; there could only be submission. Here, the story of Adam takes on its ontological significance—the

⁹ G. Marcel, *Homo Viator*, p. 291.

possibility of defiance represents the very condition of a free life.

It is only a dialectic method of thinking which can express this mixture of being and nothingness, of consciousness and non-consciousness which constitutes the world of transcendent being. In this dialectic we shall have to make use of many different techniques; sometimes we shall have to employ myth and sometimes concept, but we shall have to do this by setting contradictory concepts against each other; we shall have to distort, by means of their implied paradoxes, notions which have become too hackneyed so that we can disconcert the mind and direct it, away from the ordinary straightforward paths, towards the paths of darkness; we shall have to direct it away from a state of welcome to a state of defiance, from the general to the exceptional, and vice versa. The torment of existence requires a sort of counterpoint in the form of a new phraseology, because the present system of logic and grammar and the whole classical style are insufficient for the new dialectic. It also undoubtedly requires a counterpoint of action which will disconcert the moralist. We may, for instance, claim that transcendence is what is most subjective, and, in the same breath, claim that it is what is most objective. We shall have to direct all the energies of the existent to the discovery of inwardness, and then, immediately afterwards, we shall throw him over to the opposed discipline of some form of Materialist dialectic. We shall include within the same zone of existence such factors as lyrical ecstasy, rational analysis and the injurious violence of anathema. Through this final effort to go beyond all human powers, we shall evolve the requirements of a new logic of existence. It will be a form of logic which cannot be reduced to Continuitist forms of logic concerned with inclusion and relation.

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The all-embracing nature of Existentialism could not be concealed. Whether it be Christian or Atheistic, it marks a return of the religious element into a world which has tried to represent itself as pure manifestation. Christian Existentialism is an obvious defence against types of secularization of faith, a sort of prophetic revival on the basis of philosophy. Although it is hardly very widespread, Atheistic Existentialism is already bringing the light of day into dark mysticisms, and its success in this field indicates a revival of Atheism rather than a calm and gradual inculcation of a method of reflexion. The danger behind a similar type of phenomenon, which is such a poor compromise between philosophy, religion and sensibility, is that it shares in the wretched

mystical outpourings of the times, and is lost in some sort of Alexandrinism. It, also, has been born with the brand of ambivalence which it conceives to be within everything which wears the badge of being. Our task is to take the citadel by craft, and to turn aside its mortal charms. Already, the voices which realize the compromising nature of the task ahead of Existentialism ("the only philosophy which does not decry a world irremediably cut off from the world of religion"¹⁰) are mingling with those who are wondering "if all existence which has no metaphysical basis, and in which, as a consequence, intelligence can play no part in the search for an indispensable form of truth, is not a form of existence which is necessarily confused and miserable."¹¹ We must be on the lookout for those who come forward at this stage with pious zeal to clear the dead wood of this concept from the philosophic drama in an attempt to show the latest set of bad boys the error of their ways by means of the authorized application of intellectual sedatives! Of all their outworn projects the only thing that remains is that Existentialism, which is the heir to an outworn form of Rationalism, must not be divorced from that flowering of existence which is what lucid exercise of reason represents. Existentialism may, of course, become just another of those schisms which, in the past, because of the crisis they have provoked, ended up as allies of the Church they originally set out to shock.

The Rationalism of Western Europe holds a vital message which must be kept alive in the world; if Existentialism can avoid this baroque type of spiritual worthlessness into which some people seem to be driving it, and if it can, without any juggling with words, rediscover the secret of the fulfilment of existence, then it will be able to present a rejuvenated outward and inward appearance to the gaze of other parts of the world which are already advancing upon us with their enormous wealth and their attitude of disdain.

¹⁰ Gilson, *L'Existence*, Ed. Gallimard, 1946.

¹¹ J. Grenier, *L'Existence*.

APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHICAL AND GENERAL NOTES

ON SOME EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHERS MENTIONED IN THIS BOOK

HEIDEGGER, Martin, [born 1889] Heidegger was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg-im-Breisgau. He became a member of the Nazi Party. His works include: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929) and *Being and Time*.

JASPERS, KARL [born 1883] Jaspers is Professor of Philosophy at Heidelberg. He did not embrace the Nazi creed. In 1937, he published his work: *Descartes and Philosophy*. Another of his works is entitled: *Man in the Modern World*. It would be more or less correct to say that Existentialism in its present non-Christian form was produced by Jaspers and Heidegger during the inter-war years.

KIERKEGAARD, Sören Aaby, [1813-55] Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen and studied theology at the University of Copenhagen where he graduated in 1840 with a treatise entitled *On Irony*. He travelled in Germany but, in 1842, settled in his native city.

From childhood Kierkegaard was precocious and throughout his life suffered from bad health and was always subject to morbid depression.

In 1842, Kierkegaard published "*Either . . . Or*", the work on which, until recently, his reputation mainly rested outside Denmark. In his last years, he conducted a feverish agitation against the theology and practice of the Danish State Church on the ground that religion is something for the individual and absolutely separated from the State and the world. His philosophy is mainly based on the absolute dualism of Faith and Knowledge.

Kierkegaard's ability as a dialectician is regarded by some critics as little inferior to Plato's, and his influence on Danish literature, both in style and matter, has been considerable. Ibsen took his character, Brand, in the drama of the same name, from Kierkegaard.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich Wilhelm [1844—1900] Nietzsche was born in the Prussian village of Röcken. His family on both sides had a long Protestant clerical tradition and Nietzsche himself was intended for the Church. At the University of Bonn, however, where he had a brilliant career, he abandoned the study of theology for that of philosophy. At the age of twenty-five he was appointed Professor of Philosophy at Basel where he became associated with Wagner, the musician, and was, for a time, influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer. His first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy* showed the influence of Wagner, and made him an outlaw in the eyes of contemporary German classicists.

Nietzsche eventually broke with both Wagner and Schopenhauer, both of whom he came to regard as "degenerates" in the ethical sense because of their devotion to Christian and Buddhist negation. In 1879 he resigned his professorship owing to ill-health and lived for the rest of his life in Northern Italy and on the Riviera. Between 1883 and 1885, he produced his greatest work: *Thus Said Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche's philosophy is difficult to understand. It is a reaction against the Judeo-Christian morality of Western Europe and is violently opposed to the levelling process of nineteenth century theories of equality. Nietzsche called for a greater "masculinization" of the world and postulated the evolution of a finer and higher type of enlightened ruler caste which should ultimately regenerate the whole human race. He foresaw with uncanny accuracy the world upheavals which have occurred during the first half of the twentieth century. He has often been accused of being the father of both "Kaiserism" and Naziism. Apologists have, however, claimed that his real philosophy has never been understood properly and has always been perverted to base uses.

PASCAL, Blaise, (1623-62) A French religious philosopher and mathematician and physicist. He was born in Auvergne, the son of the President of the Court of Aids at Clermont, and was brought up in Paris. Actually, Pascal attended no school but was educated by his father. He was a very precocious child, and all his life suffered from ill-health.

In 1646, the Pascal family became Jansenists (see footnote page 23) and both Pascal and his sister were attracted to the religious community at Port Royal in Paris. Between 1651 and 1654, Pascal is supposed to have lived a life of considerable extravagance, dissipation and luxury, but it is a fact that during these years he produced some of his famous treatises. In 1647 he had conducted his famous experiment on the barometer, and he was also an authority on Conic Sections and the Infinitesimal Calculus.

Pascal gradually became more and more interested in the problem of existence, though, at first, he sought some solution other than that provided by traditional Christianity.

As the result of his famous "accident" in which his life was saved from drowning, Pascal became devoted to the Christian viewpoint and lived for much of the rest of his life with the Port Royal community, though he never actually became a vowed member. Ultimately, he came to believe in a form of Christian scepticism which should combat all other forms of scepticism, and in a possible denial of all natural theology. He finally came to rely on the doctrine of the Original Fall of Man and on pure Faith and Revelation.

His most famous work, *Reflexions (Pensées)*, was published posthumously (see footnote page 14).

Pascal died in June, 1662, from internal derangements and a lesion of the brain.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul, [born 1905] M. Sartre was born in Paris of mixed Protestant and Roman Catholic ancestry. His father was a naval officer who died of fever on the Indo-China station and the death of his mother left him an orphan at an early age. He was brought up by his grandparents and educated at Lycée (High School) La Rochelle in Paris and at the École Normale (Teachers' Training College) of the University of Paris. He seems to have been an undistinguished student in his undergraduate days, but during the thirties travelled in Germany as a research student under the auspices of the Philosophy Department of the University of Paris. In Germany, he took lectures under Husserl, the mentor of Heidegger, though, apparently, he never actually met Heidegger. Like Pascal and Kierkegaard, M. Sartre has never enjoyed robust health.

Sartre became a schoolmaster and taught philosophy and Classics at Lycée Janson de Sailly in Paris where his refusal to wear a coat, collar or tie met with some staff disapproval.

In 1938, M. Sartre published his novel *La Nausée (Nausea)* and, in 1939, he was mobilized as a private in the Army Medical Corps. He was made a prisoner in 1940, but was released on medical grounds in 1941. M. Sartre returned to Paris and eventually became a Resistance leader. In 1943, his play, *The Flies*, a sort of Greek drama, with subtle anti-German implications which were not lost on Frenchmen, even those who had long since forgotten their Classical learning, was successfully performed in Paris before the very eyes of the German authorities.

He came into the philosophical limelight with the publication of *Being and Nothingness* and subsequent philosophical works include *Les Chemins de la Liberté* (I. *Age de Raison*, II. *Le Sursis*, III. *La Dernière Chance*). After the war he became the leader of a circle which frequented the Café Flore in the so-called Latin Quarter. He is now said to frequent a more exclusive café elsewhere.

M. Sartre has visited the United States since the war, and his play *The Respectable Prostitute* deals with America. Another play, *Men without Shadows*, deals with the Resistance Movement. His most famous play, *Huis Clos* (In Closed Court), was played privately in London in 1946, under the titled *Vicious Circle*.

SOCRATES (469 B.C.—399 B.C.) One of the greatest Athenian philosophers. He was the son of Sophroniscus, a sculptor, and his mother was a midwife. He did his military service as an Infantry soldier and served probably at Samos (441-440) and Delium (424). He took no part in practical politics, claiming that this would have meant compromise of his principles, though, at one period, at least, he served on the Council of 500. In the year 399 B.C., probably at the age of seventy, he was indicted for "impiety" and "religious corruption of the young," convicted and sentenced to death. He refused to consider offers of assistance to escape from prison on the ground that, though the sentence and finding of the court were contrary to fact, the court was a properly-constituted and legitimate one and must be obeyed.

Curiously enough, Socrates wrote nothing, and information about him and his philosophy is obtained chiefly from the *Dialogues* of Plato (428 B.C.—348 B.C.) and the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon both of whom came into first-hand contact with him only during the last ten or twelve years of his life. Physically, Socrates was a very ugly man, with bulging eyes, stub nose, broad nostrils and a wide mouth.

Socrates, who had the temperament of a "mystic," believed in the existence of one all-wise and all-powerful God, and claimed that his belief could be supported not only by the material evidence of the order of Nature but also by revelations given by dreams, signs and oracles.

Probably, Socrates' greatest contribution to philosophy was to introduce "the practical use of reason" into the central problem of philosophy, *viz.*, to formulate a rule of life. Cicero said of him that "he brought philosophy down from heaven to earth." One of his fundamental propositions was that care for one's *soul* must take precedence over care for the body or for "possessions," and that the "soul" is most

truly a man's real self. It is, according to Socrates, no happiness to have health, strength or wealth unless we know how to use them advantageously.

Socrates thus became the founder of a doctrine of *absolute morality* based on the conception of a type of felicity which represents the good, not of man as an Athenian or a Greek, but of *man as man*.

It is easy to see how M. Mounier connects Socrates with Existentialism.

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